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THE WISDOM OF THE FIELDS

By the same Author—

THIS PLOT OF EARTH

DOWNLAND MAN

SHEPHERD'S COUNTRY

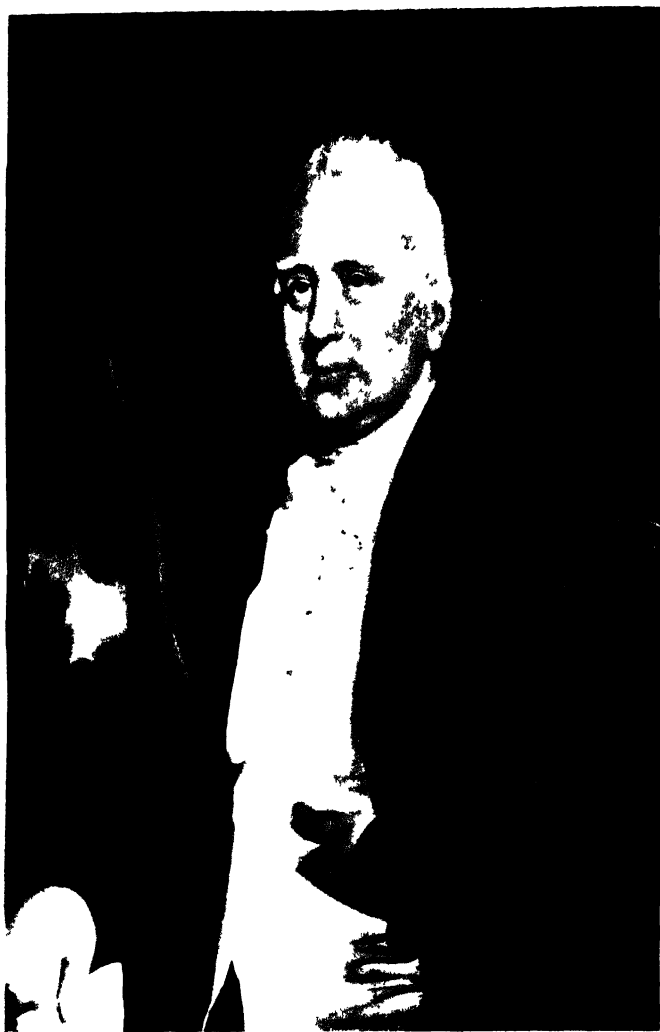
REMEMBRANCE

THE ENGLISH COUNTRYMAN

THE TREE OF LIFE

MEN OF EARTH

ETC. ETC.



WILLIAM COBBETT

From a portrait by an unknown artist, in the National Portrait Gallery

THE WISDOM OF THE FIELDS

by

H. J. MASSINGHAM



Collins

14 ST. JAMES'S PLACE . LONDON

1945 .

"LOSING BOTH BEAUTY AND UTILITY"

King Henry V.

DEDICATED
WITH AFFECTION AND GRATITUDE
TO
ARTHUR BRYANT

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PREFACE

THE FIRST CHAPTER of this book is a study of Cobbett and of his meaning for us to-day. Chapters II to VI give personal descriptions of certain craftsmen in village, town and region, who in our century have maintained the Cobbett doctrine as expressed in his *Cottage Economy*. Chapters VII to XI contain pictures of various living farmers who, both as unconscious survivors and conscious pioneers, have carried on the Cobbett tradition as it appears in his *Rural Rides*. The Epilogue covers a wider field stretching behind Cobbett and his successors and into the future.

These portraits depict the kind of England and Englishman that Cobbett loved, but are more necessary to the welfare and even survival of England than they were in his own time. They are stragglers from a lost community that have wandered into the strange land of our own era, while the evidences of a lost culture they represent are like discarded bygones found in a derelict barn. The men I am going to describe are, on the analogy of the "Sons of Ben," the "Sons of Cobbett" and grandsons of his "Commons of England"; the things are the torn and faded scraps of a priceless manuscript.

But the spirit behind these people and things is, like Cobbett himself, more modern than the moderns because it is the promise of the future no less than salvage from the past. What replaced Cobbett's world is rapidly dissolving; its new strength triumphed over his passion, but now the light from his flame penetrates our dark age and gives firm guidance through it. A new war lies before us, the greatest of all wars, the war of values, and it may be that our soldiers who have so valiantly borne themselves through the hell of modern war will have a part to play in this other war.

I must acknowledge my debt first to the countrymen with whom I stayed, among whom I travelled and whose letters I received during 1944. They, friends and strangers, are the backbone of the book. Next, to my friends: Mr. Willoughby Dewar for notably assisting me in the first chapter on Cobbett, to Mr. C. H. Gardiner for supplying me with valuable information in

the sixth chapter and Mr. L. T. C. Rolt for giving me facilities in personal contacts for parts of Chapters IV and V. I wish particularly to thank Mrs. E. L. Sell whose story was the foundation of Chapter II. The readers of Chapters X and XI will see for themselves how fruitful were my journeys and talks with the hero of them, my friend, Mr. J. E. Hosking. Lastly, I owe my friend, Mr. Arthur Bryant, a debt I can never repay. He went through the whole manuscript twice with the utmost care. It is no exaggeration to say that his suggestions and criticisms have been the making of it. To him as its foster-father I have dedicated it.

The book is practically all new, but a few pages have appeared rather differently worded in *The Field*, *Time and Tide* and *The Countrygoer*, to whose editors I express my thanks.

H. J. M.

April, 1945.

CHAPTER I

RIDER OF THE SHIRES

"I saw great Cobbett riding,
The horseman of the shires;
And his face was red with judgment
And a light of Luddite fires.

"A trailing meteor on the Downs he rides above the rotting towns,
The Horseman of Apocalypse, the Rider of the Shires."

G. K. CHESTERTON.

WILLIAM COBBETT was born in 1762 at the old market town of Farnham in Surrey. His grandfather had been a field labourer, but his father kept an inn and was an independent small farmer. Cobbett was fond of asserting that he could not remember a time when he did not earn his own living. When he was earning a few pennies a week scaring birds off the crops, he was not old enough to climb the gates, and the tramp home was "a task of infinite difficulty." But there was never a hint of bitterness or revolt in his references to those early years: he recalled with joy that he had been "born and bred up in the sweet air."

At twelve, Cobbett played truant by walking to London and on the way laid the foundations of his self-education by buying a copy of Swift's *Tale of a Tub* on the road. Swift's caustic tongue became his mentor. At twenty, after failing to get into the Navy, he jumped into the London stage-coach and spent a miserable time in the "great Wen" as an "understrapping quill-driver." It was characteristic of him that, rather than return home in the style of the prodigal son, he enlisted in the 54th Foot, went with his regiment to Nova Scotia, became a sergeant-major and in 1791 was discharged with honour.

While engaged upon regimental office work, he had detected some of the officers peculating funds that should have been spent upon the welfare of the men. On his return to England he had a first skirmish with authority in his attempt to expose them. Fearing the consequences to himself when every effort was made to hush up the scandal, he packed off to France with the servant girl he had married in Canada. No sooner had he set eyes on her

than he had sworn that none but she should be his wife, and when, after a long absence, she returned to him intact the money he had given her for her needs, he married her at once. She proved a wife to him of the type whose housewifely virtues he was later to praise in *Cottage Economy* and was his patient helpmate in all his enterprises and misadventures. They continued in France where he taught English, until the discomfort of living there amid the turbulence of revolutionary politics drove him back to America, whose own revolution was behind it. But in America he discovered that he was an Englishman.

He heard his country vilified on all sides and met more trouble as a hotly contentious journalist under the name of Peter Porcupine. So virile and plain-spoken were his writings that, when he returned to England in 1800 after a residence of eight years, he found himself something of a celebrity. He was welcomed by the War Secretary, William Windham, and his Tory followers, who felt that his trenchant and passionate propaganda would serve as an effective political instrument.

But Cobbett was never a party man. His weakness and his strength lay in being a no-man rather than a yes-man. Even in his early years he was not wholly a Tory: at his father's inn, the Jolly Farmers, his father and his friends used to empty their mugs to the American colonists in revolt against King George. Cobbett's Toryism under the patronage of Windham was as much due to his experience of America's antagonism to England as to any nursing he received at the hands of the Tory Party. The kind of Toryism Cobbett believed in was what most Tories of his day had either forgotten or never known. Its first article was a fear and loathing of the new plutocracy with which the Tories were becoming as entangled as the Whigs already were. For a time, Cobbett found himself able to work with Windham who had at least a sentimental regard for that older England which he held to be perishing at the hands of the new financial politics. But Windham's England was the England of the squirearchy and so, comparatively speaking, modern. The land which Cobbett loved was immemorial. It did not belong to any single class, and it was not a land in which only two classes could exist, the masters and the mastered. In the older England, there had not been two but many classes. There was no bridgeless gulf between the peer and the poorest peasant. Between them had stood men of countless

stations "in order, priority and degree," and Cobbett's "Toryism" in this respect was akin to Shakespeare's. England, he said, was "advancing to that state in which there are but two classes of men, masters and abject dependents." Disraeli's "two nations" in *Sybil* were exactly the same as Cobbett's two classes. It was not the England of yesterday or the day before that Cobbett wished to preserve; it was an England that had outlasted all the ages before them.

Cobbett's partnership with the Tories was therefore short-lived. At the end of it he bought his farm at Botley and acquired the status of a yeoman. Having thus wedded himself to the soil out of which he was born, he might have been expected to grapple himself to Toryism with hoops of steel. He did exactly the opposite—the reason why Hazlitt charged him with "outrageous inconsistency" and "headstrong fickleness."

But why did Cobbett become a Radical? He has himself explained his political change of coat in *Two-Penny Trash*, the new edition in 1816 of the *Political Register*, the forerunner in reporting Parliamentary debates of our Hansard. Some years ago, he wrote:

"I wrote a little book called *Cottage Economy*. . . . It teaches the brewing of beer, the making of bread, the rearing of pigs and poultry, the keeping of a cow, the curing of bacon, and, in short everything necessary to teach a small family how to make the most of a little bit of ground, and how to live well by good management. . . . But when I wrote that book, I told the reader that it would be of little use without a reform of the Parliament."

The Radicals, disunited in all else, were at one in demanding the abolition of the rotten boroughs and the reform of the Parliament.

But why was Cobbett so fiercely interested in this reform? Again he gave his own answer:

"It may be asked, will a reform of the Parliament give the labouring man a cow or a pig . . . will it put bread and cheese into his satchel instead of infernal cold potatoes; will it give him a bottle of beer to carry to the field, instead of making him lie down on his belly to drink out of the brook? Will parliamentary reform put an end to the harnessing of men and women by a hired overseer to draw carts like beasts of burden;

will it put an end to the practice of putting up labourers to auction like negroes in Carolina or Jamaica; will it put an end to the system which caused the honest labourer to be fed worse than the felons in the gaols; . . . will it put an end to the foul, the beastly, the nasty practice of separating men by force from their wives? The enemies of reform jeeringly ask us whether reform would do these things for us? and I answer directly that IT WOULD DO THEM ALL."

It would not only, he held, save the labourer from such degradation by giving him the vote but afford him the opportunity of recovering or holding fast to his plot of earth. It would help to reinstate the yeomanry and smaller gentry whose decline was interlocked with that of the labourer. But it would also relieve all the men of the land, landowners, farmers and labourers, together with the artisans of the new industrial towns, from the mounting burden of the National Debt and from the "deadweight" of the fundholders, sinecurists and pensioners. The Reform Bill would end the process by which the many poor were becoming poorer and the few rich richer.

Cobbett became a Radical, that is to say, for the very reason commonly assigned to Conservatism. I am a Radical, he said, because Radicalism means "belonging to the root." Cobbett's kind of Radicalism was the reverse of what it became later in the nineteenth century—a synonym for the "Progressive" who was to detach himself completely from both rural and traditional roots. The Reform Bill of 1832, passed by the Parliament in which Cobbett sat as member for Oldham, actually gave the vote not to the labourer but to the new commercial middle classes who represented the system of finance he hated. This reflects upon the blindness of his judgment but not upon either his integrity or his consistency.

Riding the counties, touring the industrial North, addressing countless meetings, suffering two years' imprisonment in Newgate from 1809 onwards for denouncing the flogging of militiamen by German mercenaries, defending the Luddites in 1811 without countenancing their pitiable attacks on the machines that deprived them of their livelihood, issuing paper after paper each with a circulation of 60,000, fulminating against the Game Laws, against political jobbery, the buying up of estates by the

new rich, the Enclosures, the Malthusians, the tithe-eating parsons, the tax-eating placemen, pouring out his personality and vitality not only against an impersonal money-power but scores of individual tax-gatherers and loan-jobbers, he placed all his eggs in one basket. He staked all upon the Reform Bill and lost.

It is not too much to say that Cobbett paid for his error of judgment and the bitter disillusionment it brought him with his life. In the Parliament of 1832 he was little more than a back-bencher and made no more impression upon his fellow-members than upon the spring-tide of the whole age that had turned against him. Three years later he was dead, a broken man, and the vision of England he had presented in so luminous a style and with so disorderly a temper died with him.

How could it have been otherwise and what cup of a sharper poison could have been given him? Not only were all the manifold causes he had fought for tumbled in ruins and at the hands of the Parliament he had spent himself in building up, but the evils he believed to be sapping the life-blood of his country were aggravated.¹ If the 1832 Parliament reformed the rotten boroughs, it gave the "cotton-lords" that commercial supremacy in buying cheap and selling dear they were to retain for nearly a century. It passed the Benthamite New Poor Law, which enacted that a man too poor to keep himself and his family should be shut up in one of the new workhouses known as the "New Bastilles." So far from checking enclosure it encouraged it until the whole process culminated in the General Enclosure Act of 1845. The votes went to the builders of the new prosperity, while the majority were left voteless until they had long forgotten their stake in the land and their intercourse with nature and were broken on the wheels of heavy industry. It was not for an England that was soon to become "the workshop of the world" that Cobbett had spent his life defending the little workshops of the villages and market towns and the little plots of his ex-peasants.

In *Advice to Young Men* he had written, "I wanted to see no innovation in England" and now he was confronted with a "hideous revolution" that "set itself to work to add to them (the innovations) and to enlarge those that already existed." He had been a champion of the unpropertied artisan and the dispossessed

¹ Since the passing of the Reform Act, . . . the altar of Mammon has blazed with triple worship." Disraeli—*Sybil*.

peasant and henceforward his commoners were to be transmuted into "the lower orders." He had maintained that all three layers of rural society, "the resident native gentry attached to the soil," the farmers and the labourers, were mutually interdependent and that an injury to one was an injury to all:

"Farmers," he said, "make common cause with your labourers, for you can't exist without them.

"The tax-gatherer presses the landlord; the landlord the farmer and the farmer the labourer. Here it falls at last and this class is made so miserable that a felon's life is better than that of a labourer."

But now "the paper money system" had been given a new lease of life by the moneyed interests of the new electorate and the displacement of the older gentry by the new rich, detached from the soil, proceeded apace. Even the older squires had become tax-eaters as well as tax-payers and lived not by their estates but their investments in the funds. The corruption of the landed aristocracy by the money-power, to which the shock of the Reform Bill had fully opened Cobbett's eyes, became one of the main themes of Trollope's novels twenty years after his death.

In the year before the Reform Parliament sat, Henry Cook of Micheldever had been hanged for knocking off the hat of Bingham Baring, the financier, in the desperate revolt of the labourers under "Captain Swing." Cobbett carried that judicial murder to his grave. It became a symbol to him, and he was a man much given to symbolism. The finance of excess taxation and the debt system, the Enclosures and the despair of the labourers became fused in his mind into the figure of Henry Cook. Perhaps his own despair after the passage of the Reform Bill saw the shadow of the martyred lad darkening the future of England. For he believed that the Reform Parliament had dealt a mortal blow at that peasant England for which Henry Cook had died.

If Cobbett be cut to the measure of his own age, his life was a total failure. No sooner was "the most powerful political writer of the day," as Hazlitt called him, buried with his fathers

in the churchyard of Farnham, than he was forgotten. Even his own people forgot him, as the countrymen sucked into the factories of the industrial "wens" were in one generation to forget the fields that had been their fathers' for a thousand years. Were this failure and this forgetfulness purely the consequence of defects in his character and education which were bitterly resented and ultimately brought him into disrepute?

On the modern reader Cobbett leaves an impression of a wild dispersion of energy. His lack of self-discipline creates a sense of waste and frustration, and he too often confounded his onslaughts on abuses with personal abuse of individuals. He was not the man to let I dare not wait upon I would, and never paused to ask whether it would be wiser not. He was just as self-confident about things he failed to understand as about those he knew better than any man in England. Often he hit right and left in a kind of frenzy, and charged as blindly as a rhinoceros. Among his host of enemies the worst was not infrequently himself. Though he possessed a style like a steel blade, he often used it like a club. The wind that filled his sails was partly that of a Titanic vanity. But it was purely personal and has an element of naiveté; his conceit had nothing in it of calculating egoism. He was a man of wrath but no Stiggins.

Often he was needlessly provocative. He rode round and round Dundas at Highclere merely to annoy a man whose politics he detested, and with his son went whip-cracking and hullabalooing to torment the Botley parson. When he sensed, and sensed rightly, that there was defilement in the air, he could not contain himself. He roared aloud and plunged without first probing into the details of the scandal. He was always the intuitive man, and a fatal impetuosity translated his detections into instant action. His attack on Peel in the House of Commons is the classic example of his rightness in smelling out corruption and complete wrongness in the details and direction of his attack. Peel had not manipulated the currency in order, as Cobbett said, to increase the value of his ministerial salary. But that manipulation for which Peel's Bill was largely responsible had fattened the new rich of whom Peel, for all his personal integrity, was a supreme spokesman. It is easy to see not only why Creevey called Cobbett "a foul-mouthed and malignant fellow" but how apt he was to arm his adversaries with both hands. Their weapons were his own mistakes.

But all this was not the ultimate cause for the hatreds his hates aroused. He was feared as well as derided and scorned. Authority did not heed his warnings and dark prophecies, but it trembled lest he should raise up the dispossessed against it. It prosecuted him in those fears and was discomfited. And if the Reform Bill had given votes to a determining majority of the English people, it is likely that some at least of Cobbett's aims would have been achieved. For the machine-workers in the new towns were still, when the Bill was passed, conscious of their peasant stock.

He was feared, too, because he told the truth about a number of things which almost everybody in public life, then and for generations to come, wanted to conceal not only from the public but from themselves. Cobbett himself cannot be understood unless the nature of those truths be realised. It is clear that he did not foresee the years immediately ahead of him. When he was riding up and down English country in the eighteen-twenties, reporting for his *Political Register* and haranguing a labourer met upon the road or a crowd gathered to hear him, he was usually a prophet of the immediate wrath to come. The wrath did not come. On the contrary, it appeared as though events had falsified his predictions. The intoxicating if most unequally distributed prosperity of the mid-Victorian age lay immediately ahead. The mood that heralded it was complacent and optimistic, and so a fertile soil for the doctrine of automatic and inevitable progress, unknown a hundred years before. Cobbett's truths were timeless ones because they were founded upon first principles. But time must take time to bring in their revenges. Their incidence fell not upon his contemporaries nor their successors but ourselves. Thus, quite apart from the personal antipathy he aroused among his opponents, the fear of him was mixed with the contempt felt for him who cries wolf, wolf, when no wolf comes. The superficial evidence was all against him, and *The Times* in a scornful obituary notice dismissed him as an episode.

Disraeli said in *Coningsby*, "the spirit of the age is the very thing that a great man changes." Cobbett was too great a man to be carried away by it, to drift with it, to bow to it as not to be avoided. He was not great enough to turn it. But the fact that he withstood it is a sign not of his weakness but of his strength. And the forces arrayed against him were gigantic. Would a man of greater wisdom, of a more formal education

and of a superior strategy have prevailed against them? He stood against them like a bull stuck with darts in the ring, and he stood alone.

For his was the world of the new industrialism which Blake had foreshadowed in his "dark Satanic mills," and Cobbett's ex-commoners were being rapidly absorbed into it. It was a world that was beginning to think in terms of the inorganic and controlling the forces of physical nature. But when Cobbett thought of nature, he was thinking of the fields he knew, Little Foxhanger, the Seven Acres, Haw Croft, Priest Croft, Barley Close, Grunt Drove Meadow, plots of land that demanded individual treatment and had been named by his own people who for centuries had had a responsible stake in them. It was a world about to set forth upon "the conquest of nature," and Cobbett's idea of man's function was for him to co-operate with nature in the management of living growth. It was above all a period of expansion, propelled by the application of cheap power and the progress of mechanical inventions. The way of life that Cobbett taught was the very reverse. His view of this extensive movement is given in *Cottage Economy*, which is a treatise of intensive husbandry. This expansion, the opposite of conservation, was accompanied as time went on by social disintegration. Cobbett was an apostle of holding the fabric of things, both in society and among individuals, together.

The new machine-power was not in itself the cause of a revolutionary attitude to old values and stabilities; it was a terribly effective instrument of it. The real cause was the dominance of a new state of mind which used the machine to accomplish its ends, and, as its powers grew, became more and more impatient of traditionally religious and ethical checks upon economic expansion. Those ends were the pursuit of wealth not for any specific social purpose but as a standard of value in itself. Cobbett's perception of this is at the root of his constant and often bewildering diatribes against finance. Thus ends were beginning to be lost in means and just the same process of confusion was happening to the machine itself. Progress began to be identified with technical advances and from this fusion arose the theory of a progress that was inevitable: that is to say, progress was in itself regarded as a machine, and so became separated from growth, which is an organic process. The effect of the machine went much

further than throwing the skilled handloom weavers in the towns out of work and breaking up the cottage crafts that Cobbett loved by the migration of their rural workers to the new industrial towns. In opposing this drift and trying to reintroduce certain of the crafts, Cobbett stood like a barrier reef against a whole sea of change. But how great a change he hardly knew. The mechanisation of work went further than the creation of such squalor, poverty and slum-conditions as Disraeli described in *Sybil*.

On the one hand, it undermined the institution of the small property that, with the economic freedom it gave, was the corner-stone of Cobbett's faith. On the other, for the skilled labour of the craftsman and artisan on whose behalf Cobbett fought all his life, factory work began to substitute the unskilled labour of the machine-minder. The early reformers very properly welcomed the machine as a means to eliminating drudgery; what it actually did was to eliminate skill and pride in work and so create a new drudgery of its own, the drudgery of mechanising not only work but men. This alone explains the wonderful reception Cobbett received from the industrial workers. He did not himself think at all clearly about the advent of machinery. But the machine-minders of the North recognised in him the defender of a way of life that their fathers and even they themselves had enjoyed and contrasted bitterly with their present servitude.

Because the end of life was becoming the accumulation of riches, finance too had got out of hand and from a means became an end. It had made enclosure a profitable investment and was sweeping the land-workers off the land. It was beginning to ruin agriculture altogether since, when money was being used to breed money, it was being diverted from irrigating the growing of crops. Cobbett saw clearly that prices, rising year by year during the French wars, had upset the whole agricultural equilibrium and made land and agriculture "objects of speculation." Landlords refused to grant long leases because the value of money was bound to fall, while the labourers got nothing out of the artificial prosperity of the war years. Small farms were being absorbed into large. Just as in the nineteen-twenties prices fell after the war and deflation replaced inflation, the full weight of the depression falling on the farmers and labourers. The farmers of his day were living on borrowed money just like those of our century. And Cobbett did realise, as few enough modern

farmers do, the inveterate hostility of finance and industrialism to agriculture. So, though not understanding the detailed workings of currency, he was sound in his demand for a steady one.

But the real point of his criticism of his age is that he saw the immediate issue as shaking the very pillars of society. It was because he perceived this stalking terror that a very *daemon* took possession of him. He prophesied that this financial "THING" would destroy the stable agriculture of a thousand years and in the fullness of time it did destroy it. In the poverty of the labourer he called his "chopsticks," he foresaw that the debt system would become a millstone round the neck of the nation and so it has become. He dreaded that, as taxation increased to feed an insatiable Debt, so security in and responsibility for property would result in loss of property for the many and much too much of it for the few. History has justified him. As champion of the "small man," he was vehement in denouncing monopoly. The growth of monopoly is a much more pressing issue in our own day¹ than it was in his. But he showed his greatest historical insight in his crusade on behalf of a self-supporting nation resting firmly upon its biological roots. These agricultural foundations, he declared, were the only bulwark against the misuse and so the corruption of money. When a secondary economics overbore the primary vocation of agriculture, values went to the wall. While Cobbett was living, England was beginning to correlate her new position as "the workshop of the world" with the bulked imports of cheap food from abroad. He was thus considered as a stupid and sentimental impediment in the path of progress. But with us he emerges as more modern than the moderns.

III

There are two reasons why this is so. When Cobbett is considered as a countryman, his faults and failures sink into comparative insignificance. Secondly, the word "foundations" sums up the whole of him. He stood for foundations not in any particular period but in all periods and, though he was the most English of Englishmen, not only for one nation but for all

¹ That terrible book, *Ill Fares the Land* (Faber, 1945), describes how it has degraded both land and people in U.S.A.

nations. His modernism becomes a shining light because the modern age has threatened those foundations as never before in our history.

Cobbett has often been appraised as the guardian of the "commoners of England," dispossessed by the Enclosures. He has often been admired as the passionate lover of rural England, the England of the agricultural South that his piercing eye took in from the saddle. But he has been rarely if at all approached as reflecting and representing the countryman's point of view, whether labourer, farmer or squire. Though often in conflict and very differently placed in station and conditions of living, all three, so far as they fulfil their service to the land, do throughout their history share a common point of view. In his simple forthright English Cobbett spoke it. In fact, he embodied it. He translated it into his politics and economics, into all his ideas about man's social relations. But because the cottager was the foundation of the whole rural structure, as that structure is the foundation of the national life, it was to the cottager's well-being that he dedicated his arduous life. This perception, for instance, is the key to Cobbett's insistence upon the primary value and virtue of the family. His ruralism can hardly be called a philosophy of life because so much of it was instinctive. But it was certainly a way of life which with many vicissitudes had lasted ever since there was an England. The rural attitude to life, in which the whole English tradition is rooted, sprang to articulate life in Cobbett at the very moment when it was beginning to crumble, and give way to alien forces. And it is through him that we not only understand what it was in his time but has always been.

He therefore truly interprets the soul of the countryman. The significance of all that Cobbett wrote is that it is countryman's literature. It is liberally sprinkled, for instance, with tale-telling, and telling tales has been the immemorial social habit of the countryman. It abounds in the colloquialisms and familiarities of country speech. It is concrete, realistic and based on observations of actual things. It is full of memories, and so is life on the land. It loves parables and illustrations as did the country Carpenter of Galilee. It makes plain statements as countrymen do and is as fresh as the fields after rain, even though Cobbett keeps on saying the same thing over and over again. To read Cobbett is to hear of him, for his "literature" is that of the spoken voice rather than

the pen, and this oral language is characteristically rural. It is an earnest and moral tongue, not to say didactic, and the countryside has always been a stronghold of the traditional English morality. And Cobbett's style is beefy and brawny as befits the style of a man who glorified the farmhouse meal and home-brew. Chesterton has said that there always are two songs in the Englishman's ears: "Home Sweet Home" and "Far Away and Long Ago." Cobbett's life fulfilled them both.

To discover the essence of Cobbett's ruralism we have to accompany him as he rides over English earth, casting on all sides the sharpest pair of eyes in England. It is by what he saw that we gather what he thought, what he taught and what he believed. Much of the *Rural Rides*, written between 1821 and 1832, is descriptive of the countryside from the saddle. But Cobbett's eyes never saw the landscape alone as a picture; they saw everything that grew and walked upon it, and not only these but the politics and economics they signified. In the valley of the Avon, for instance, he counted 7000 sheep in a parish of 3500 acres. The population was 530 and he calculated that it produced enough bread, bacon, mutton, wool, game and dairy foods to maintain a community of 2500. This is a good example of how he used a particular observation to illustrate an economic issue of the widest significance. In the same way, his eyes never separated what was useful from what was beautiful, and so all traditional countrymen have seen them. They are bound to be so seen because nobody is in a better position to realise that English country is man-made or man-husbanded than the countryman. The English countryside from prehistoric times has been man at one end and soil at the other, and this organic sense was the inspiration of *Rural Rides*.

A tree was not beautiful to Cobbett if it was covered with ivy or moss, if its growth was crooked and its heart unsound. He hated firs and spruces ("beggarly stuff") in inverse ratio to his partiality for the oak and the ash. The picturesque attitude to natural beauty would find this meaningless. But firs and spruces are not a native part of England's flesh and bones like Kipling's oak and ash and thorn. Long before Cobbett and Kipling, Wordsworth and Cowper, they had been the very stuff of livelihood, trade and beauty to the long generations of nameless craftsmen. That was how Cobbett saw them, both rising from the earth and

lying in the workshop. The abstract view of beauty as a thing in itself, plucked out of its context in life or truth, in use or virtue, meant as little to him as his view of landscape to the votaries of the merely pictorial. It would be hardly possible to pick out of the whole of Cobbett more than half a dozen descriptive passages in which he looks at the country apart from its husbandry. He has, for instance, many references to the birds of the countryside. But the kind that figures far more frequently than any other is the rook, the bird that follows the plough.

His way of seeing beauty and use as two halves of one whole appears just as conspicuously in his attitude to the human no less than to the natural scene. At Great Bedwyn, he saw a bevy of comely girl-reapers in rags, and rode on to curse the sight, not to praise it. Cobbett had a sharp eye for a pretty girl, but beauty for him was a mockery with misery behind it. It had to be heart-deep; he had no eyes for it when only skin-deep. "Handsome is as handsome does" was his æsthetics. And if he saw with his naked eye a fine and fertile valley, he peopled it in his mind's eye with "property-holders," squires, yeomen, farmers and small-holding labourers, redeemed from the National Debt. A skimpy land, Bagshot Heath for instance, had no appeal for him at all, while he was always looking for, though seldom finding, a rich soil supporting a prosperous people.

Particularly in the cottage gardens the various aspects of his vision became harmoniously fused. "These neatly kept and productive little gardens round the labourers' houses" are "an honour to England" and to be seen nowhere else in the world. "We have to look at them to know what sort of people English labourers are." And English country itself was to him the cottage garden of the world:

"This part of these counties (Kent and Sussex) has the great blessing of numerous woods; these furnish fuel, nice sweet fuel for the heating of ovens and for all other purposes; they afford material for the making of pretty pigstyes, hurdles and dead fences of various sorts; they afford materials for making little cow-sheds; for the sticking of pease and beans in the gardens; and for giving to everything a neat and substantial appearance. These gardens, and the look of the cottages, the little flower-gardens which you see everywhere, and the

beautiful hedges of thorn and of privet; these are objects to delight the eyes, to gladden the heart, and fill it with gratitude to God, and with love for the people."

Such warmth and tenderness of sensibility are only superficially at odds with Cobbett's harsh and towards the end of his life scolding invective. Not only his eyes but his soul were presented with a perpetual contrast between a fertile country where "the big bull frog grasps all" and the people on it were "dirty, poor-looking, ragged" and a fertile country of which he wrote: "Here are resources, here is wealth! Here are all the means of national power and of individual plenty and happiness!" For wild natural beauty, untenanted by man, he had little or no appreciation. His views thus diverged sharply from those of the contemporary "Romantic Revival" which had little thought for a domesticated Nature with Man as her partner. A smiling land and a smiling people living on and by it, this was his earthly paradise.

IV

The *Rural Rides* thus affords us a general view of what Cobbett stood for—life seen as a living whole. The countryside was an organic whole of which man was one part and nature another. They had co-operated to make something new from which the natural bounty of earth and the natural dignity of man had flowered in unison. He saw man in exactly the same way, as a creature made whole by a just balance between hand and brain, in a proper equipoise between family and social life and in an organic relation with the earth. If *Rural Rides* is the record of how he saw the country, *Cottage Economy* is the record of how he saw man. It is in fact a brief for the supreme importance of the happy family. Its happiness, its cohesion and its independence were secured by its stake in the land whose soil it cultivated or whose products it transformed into things of common service.

This is the major reason for the primacy Cobbett accorded to the inalienable rights of private property. He stood foursquare for private property as a means to freedom and for freedom as only to be secured by private property.

"Freedom," he wrote, "means—and it means nothing else—the full and quiet enjoyment of your own property. If you have not this, if this be not secured to you, you may call yourselves what you will, but you are slaves."

His protest against the Enclosures was on the ground that they were "an outrageous invasion of private property." He had the wit to perceive that enclosure was making ownership a privilege of the few and so endangering all private ownership. By separating the family from the soil, as the Enclosures did, family wholeness was exposed to forces that were disintegrating its happiness, its cohesion and its independence. The commoner's right to cut turf or fuel upon the waste, to keep cow, goose, pig and sheep upon the common was right of property, livelihood and liberty all in one.

This right was fundamental and there was no substitute for it: amenities and a high standard of living would have seemed to him an offering of the feathers for the loss of the fowl. But Cobbett never failed to couple rights with obligations, privileges with duties. There could be no wholeness of living without the play and counterplay between them. The possession of land or workshop was conditioned by service both to them and to mankind. It is this dual significance that makes *Cottage Economy* the bible of responsible small ownership.

Its object was to instil the principles of family wholeness by written demonstration of how it could be achieved. Economy, he wrote, is management, the means by which a family can become healthy, industrious, self-respecting, self-supporting and independent. "There never was yet, and never will be, a nation permanently great, consisting, for the greater part, of wretched and miserable families." For families to be unable any longer to maintain themselves by their own "steadiness, care and skill" was to Cobbett a fundamental denial of all that his country stood for; the commonalty of England has been famed for its good living (he meant this in a double sense), and "what is government for but to secure it?" The man, he went on, who by his own and his family's exertions could provide good food, clothing and habitation was not poor. Nine out of ten must live by the sweat of their brow, and Cobbett, who was neither a revolutionary nor a dreamer of theoretic equality, fully accepted differences of degree in wealth

and of rank in society. In fact, he regarded the resident squires as the natural leaders of the countryside. But for the nine-tenths to be in poverty was degradation.

A self-supporting family with only a quarter of an acre is not poor. Home bread-baking saves shillings on every bushel of wheat, and even if the bread be but half-wheaten, the nutrition of barley and rye was proved by ancestral example. As home-made bread saves the costs of the baker's shop in health and income, so a household with 15 bushels of malt and 15 lbs. of hops can brew 1097 quarts of home-brew every year and snap its fingers at the brewery. William Harrison, in his sixteenth century *Description of England*, was with him here; 200 gallons of home-brew, he wrote, cost 20s. And "what a mess of drugs" the brewers put into the beer! More than a century later, Miss Dorothy Sayers all unconsciously paraphrased these very words. But few there be to-day who see, as Cobbett did, the family, the home-industry, responsible ownership, useful and creative work and self-maintenance as indispensable parts of a single whole, upon whose unity rested the security and health of society.

Thus Cobbett extended his idea of organic wholeness between land or industry derived from it and family to man's actual handling of the fruits of the earth his labour won. To tamper with their nutritive qualities, to extract and replace them with synthetics of whatever kind, was to break the cycle between production and consumption. But he also applied this contact between land and people not only to the preparation of natural foods but to the intimate association between the rural industry and the particular place from which its raw materials were derived. If man's bodily health was secured by preserving intact the quality of food that nature and cultivation provided, social health was maintained by the inter-relation between community and locality.

Just as Cobbett raged in *Cottage Economy* against the importation of Italian straw for hat-making, when true economy demanded that it should be grown at home, so he described in *Rural Rides* "the monopolising in the manufacture of blankets" in the Cotswolds and the ousting by centralisation of cottage gloving in Worcestershire. Here again he referred back to the old England it was his mission to reveal as the true England, where agriculture and industry were so closely intertwined that

spinning, carding and weaving were practised under almost every farmer's roof. Cobbett saw this organic localism of a multitude of little industries resting on the land slipping away. Not as a "reactionary" (he was a pioneer of many crops, including maize or "Cobbett's Corn" and wrote a Preface to Jethro Tull's *Horseshoe Husbandry*, describing his invention of the drill), but because he always thought of such industry as flowering out of agriculture and family life.

What is more, he contended that an entire regional community could and should in a properly directed economy support itself in all the variety of its occupations and activities, exchanging its surpluses with those of other regions. He never, of course, attempted to work out any regional planning programme: that was not his way. But he did illustrate what he meant from his observations in *Rural Rides*, especially along the Valley of the Avon.

He rode all the way down "this fine and beautiful and interesting valley" to find that nature and husbandry had combined to heap up a wealth the actual producers of which were half-starved.

"What a handful of people to raise such a quantity of food (he gives elaborate calculations of how much)! What injustice, what a hellish system it must be to make those who raise it skin and bone and nakedness, while the food and drink and wool are almost all carried away to be heaped on the fundholders. . . ."

And if the population had not been very much larger than as he saw it, why did one valley contain 29 churches and so many ruined manors and parsonages? He was not talking at random. The English countryside of 1920-39 was a wreckage compared with which Cobbett's was still landworthy. In his day, the labourers were in rags; in our day, the land was. He saw the gaunt labourer with hardly a coat to his back; we saw hardly a labourer at all, and those we did see, though no longer tattered, had lost their status, their independence and economic freedom as holders of property far more completely than his. In his lifetime, the General Enclosure Act of 1845 was still to come. His figures may well have been open to question. But he was *not* wrong in gathering that the rural community had steeply

declined in prosperity, security, freedom and happiness in 1825 compared with what it had been in 1425. He was *not* wrong in noticing the decline in the number and capacity of the breed of craftsmen who had built those fine and spacious churches. A multiplication of small-holdings freed from financial pressure would make the valley of the Avon and indeed most of England support a population many times greater than he saw, and at least ten times, perhaps twenty, what it is to-day.

Cobbett was perfectly logical in widening his conception of the self-supporting family living by the land to the self-supporting region. Though more complex in its institutions and gradations of society, it was still in essence, as he saw it, a collection of families. Whatever the differences in status, all owed their lives to the land they lived on, and this imposed upon them a network of neighbourliness. Was it not better, he asks, "for the consumer of the food to live near to the places where it was grown?" This thought, an extension of the theme of family self-subsistence in *Cottage Economy*, is at the core of the Avon Valley ride:

"There is corn in the hands of the corn-dealers; but it ought to be in the hands of the farmers. . . . Nothing is so sure a sign of national poverty as the absence of stock from the farmer's yard. The corn-stacks are the farmer's strong-box, the landlord's security and the nation's evidence of wealth."

Corn, not money, is riches. But money became the master when local production, marketing and distribution were replaced by a complex system of export to the benefit of commercial interests but at the expense of the self-maintaining family, of the region, and, as we see it in our time, of the fertility of the soil. In the April of 1944, Mr. A. G. Street wrote: "We've wasted the substance of our land in riotous living, in selling crops off it, in selling corn and hay and straw and sugar-beet and flax, just in order to pay taxes." He, living only a few miles from the Avon Valley, was echoing Cobbett's discoveries in riding down it.

It was precisely here that Cobbett was so strong and effective in his appeal back to the Middle Ages. His vision of wholeness (to call it by the modern term of self-sufficiency is inadequate) embraced time as well as space. Just as all true craftsmen and

farmers rely upon the experience of their fathers and yet are always looking and making ahead, so he had firmly fixed in his mind the continuity of past with present and present with future. He foresaw the ruin of agriculture because he perceived what he believed to be the basic principles of its well-being being violated under his nose. It was in the past that these principles had been founded and maintained. And it was in the Middle Ages that the unity between land and people, industry and agriculture, property and responsibility, self-government and the family, master and apprentice, had been most honoured. But Cobbett was no mediævalist in the sense that William Morris was. His appraisal of the Middle Ages was an accident. He *happened* to find there the kind of England he believed to be the true England, a very different one from the England of the "wens." The England of the villages, the little towns and the great churches; the England of things made and grown by the people for themselves and their neighbours; the self-reliant England of St. George, not of the Dragon of Debt that was devouring her.

This is self-evident from his *History of the Protestant Reformation*. He wrote it not as an apologist for Catholicism but for the social and economic system, a system of wholeness, that had flowered under its wing. He says so himself: "I have not written as a Catholic but an Englishman." Cobbett's attitude to religion can only be understood if it is seen from the angle of his crusade on behalf of wholeness of living. Both his loves and his hates pivot solely upon this hinge. He did not praise the monasteries for their "rule" nor dedication to the service of God nor for their lives of contemplation and retirement from the world. On the contrary, he glorified them for what they did *in* and *for* the world, namely for their local charities, the balance they kept between spade and pen,¹ and because they were self-supporting communities. He gathered that they had been better landlords than the gentry, and his voluminous writings upon the Religious Orders very closely echo the ages-old pronouncement of the Founding Fathers, subsequently adopted by Jefferson:

"All men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness."

¹ This injunction was part of the "Rule" both of St. Benedict and St. Bernard.

So far as this tradition was maintained, the old Church had fostered the small propertied craftsman and cultivator, whose independence and democratic self-government in the fifteenth century have in our time been commended in Dr. Trevelyan's *English Social History*.

He discovered that by an Act of Edward III the wage of a day's reaping or threshing a quarter of wheat was fixed at 4d. This 4d. would buy a pair of shoes or a gallon of old wine, while a fat goose could be had for 2½d. and a gallon of wine for 1d. The contemporary labourer might be getting 4s. instead of 4d., but he was paying 10s. instead of 5d. when he bought a bushel of wheat. In 1495, when the labourer's wage was 2s. a week, a man could in 15 weeks earn enough to buy for his whole family the wheat, malt and oatmeal he needed for the whole year. Again, the populations of the parishes of Galby and Frisby in Leicestershire numbered 49 families in 1086. In 1831, they numbered 27 and in 1931, 19.¹ Figures like these clearly explain Cobbett's attachment to the Ages of Faith.

From precisely the same point of view, Cobbett denounced both the Nonconformists (the Quakers as dealers in hops, the Methodists as "shaking the brimstone bag" or preaching heaven as compensating and so condoning poverty and its ills) and the parsons of the established church. He hated the country clergy because their pluralism had broken the golden rule of every priest to his parish, for their predatory part in the Enclosures, and for the misappropriation of tithes which had lost to the poor, the aged, the infirm, the widow and the orphan the one-third of the tenth which the old religion had ordained.

The essence of Cobbett's quarrels with contemporary Protestants of all denominations was that they were living from the land and on the people, not for the people and on the land. They had joined the enemies of both. The watchdogs had turned wolves. They were failing to render back what they received and so were false to what we call nowadays "the rule of return." And to break this rule was a sin against wholeness of living. A parson who wrote to him, "Your religion, Mr. Cobbett, seems to me altogether political" received a great answer: "The fact is that I am no Doctor of Divinity and like a religion, any religion, that tends to make men innocent and benevolent and happy, by taking

¹ *A Short History of Galby and Frisby*, by W. G. Hoskins, M.Sc., Ph.D.

the best possible means of furnishing them with plenty to eat and drink and wear." Cobbett's sense of the unseen world was defective. But he had a loving awareness of this one that was a preparation for it. His historical, political, economic, social and religious criticisms were radiations from one centre. "From the land all the good things come," and God had given men the land to make them whole.

The chaotic pugnacity of much of Cobbett's writings diverts his reader from the essential simplicity of what he preached, and it was the gospel of a fundamentally simple man. In the last resort, all of him meets in one paramount idea. It is the idea of the worth and dignity of the human person. It is this which gives coherence and depth of meaning to his descriptions of the countryside, to his views about private property, to his crusades on behalf of the labourer, to his economic theories on the relations of production and consumption, to his regionalism and to his vision of the Middle Ages. Here he was "wise with the simple clarity of vision," as Max Plowman said in one of his letters; here he is at one with Wordsworth when he addresses the 13th Book of the *Prelude* "To men as they are men within themselves."

That worth and dignity could be realised in two ways: by wholeness of character, work and status in adulthood and by education for that wholeness in youth. To the latter task he addressed himself both in his writings and by example. A self-educated man, he was at great pains to bring up his children in the precepts he had learned by teaching himself. He taught them how to educate themselves, believing that the self-reliant person was the key to the self-supporting family. Wholeness with him meant that the child or pupil had a pair of hands for further reasons than holding a book or driving a quill. His *English Grammar* derives much of its freshness and pungency and persuasive homeliness by showing the utility of everything he taught and using the bad style and jargon of his political opponents as guides by default to a true syntax. Cobbett thus understood the essentially concrete and factual mind of the child which disdains a certain modern theory summed up in a teacher's words: "Now we'll go on the magic carpet to Banana Land." His insist-

ence on utility and interest in education are the contrary of the academic slavery and forcing tactics of the modern School Certificate. A scholar who knew nothing outside his books was even more ignorant than a ploughman who could not read nor write. "A ploughman is not an ignorant man because he does not know how to read, but a wife may be justly called an ignorant woman if she does not know how to provide a dinner for her husband." If knowledge was separated from calling on the one hand and interest and pleasure on the other, Jack became a dull boy. Cobbett's view here has jumped a century into the words of a contemporary countryman: "I likes eddicated people but the worst of it is they be so dommed ignorant."

It is significant that both the *English Grammar* and *Cottage Economy* were written expressly for his youngest son. To his thinking, they were two parts of one whole. Forming character was as integral a part of education as acquiring knowledge, and work on the land as work at the desk. The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake lay outside Cobbett's province altogether. But in the craft of instructing the boy how to become a man, a whole man, a man interested in everything that he saw with his own eyes, a man of convictions, duties and rights, a good neighbour, a man who could think for himself, support his family as husbandman or craftsman and apply the affairs of his parish to the affairs of the nation, in this craft Cobbett was a master. And he was a master because into this purpose of forming a whole man he threw the whole of himself.

The correlation of these two books reveals one of Cobbett's master-ideas—the union of a receptive intelligence with the manual trades. Without it man became unbalanced. A mind detached from the organism and the sensibilities operated in the void and was liable to become presumptuous, like Lucifer marooned in space. In trying to educate his children in the virtues of all-roundness; in making self-help, versatility and a concrete experience of life integral parts of education, Cobbett was putting his finger on the dangers of specialism, abstraction and standardising knowledge. His antipathy to State education is explained by the great value he placed on home education. The State, he predicted, would teach the young submission to the order existing at the hour, which was becoming increasingly urban and industrial. It would thus undermine man's ability to

think for himself. Nazi Germany has hideously confirmed his view. And his educational programme was unconsciously true to the facts of man's evolution in the animal kingdom. Man became man by the development of his general faculties; it was the apes who specialised. Nature was with him, since her higher types are the most adaptable and self-reliant.

How educational Cobbett meant *Cottage Economy* to be is explicit throughout. He wrote it, he says, to teach his son "industry, care and sobriety." The schooling it gave in independence would rear a breed of men not content to "look out of the window for people to bring them their food and drink." For a man to learn how to look after a self-supporting mixed farm was to continue his education right through his life. A father who trained his son to gather the sheaves behind his scythe was doing his duty by him more than by sending him to school. Such has always been the view of hereditary craftsmanship. A couple of flitches of bacon were worth 50,000 Methodist sermons, and the sight of them on the rack tended more to keep a man from poaching and stealing than whole volumes of penal statutes. For children to learn how to treat animals "with gentleness and care" "softened the temper and promoted domestic harmony." A wife who was not a housewife was "unworthy of trust and confidence"; she was as deficient in judgment and resource, in common sense and observation, as she would be in patience and contentment. She would think that loaves were made by a baker as knights by a king—an act of pure creation. "I should prefer teaching my daughters to bake, brew, milk, make butter and cheese to teaching them the Bible till they had got every word of it by heart; and . . . I should know that I was in the former case doing my duty towards God as well as towards my children."

To become self-supporting on a few acres was good management; it was also an education in morality and no less an art than a bodily labour. Cobbett would have condemned our twentieth century dependence upon foreign countries to feed us as not only bad economy but moral blindness. When the "lords of the loom" took away spinning and carding from the cottage home, they starved the soul as well as the body. The means to moral as to family integration were to be found at the plough, the bench and the hearth. They were equally the source of the worth and dignity of the person as of all material wealth. The

independence of the family was Cobbett's economics; its happiness his politics, its holiness his religion. The object of education was to make families God-fearing, happy and independent.

These were the social and rural convictions Cobbett took into a world that was the cradle of the Economic Man of the future. When he rushed into politics and economics, it was at the precise moment when there came a parting of the ways between the old and the new England. Thenceforward, she set forth upon a new journey which had little or no organic relation with the past. She exchanged growth for progress and this was a revolutionary step taken without a revolution. Cobbett alone perceived the split, though Burke feared it before it came and Disraeli mourned it after its coming. But Cobbett heard the rending sound and it pierced him to the heart.

So, in order to understand the magnitude of what was happening, it is important to realise exactly what it was that Cobbett stood for. It is not enough to say that he represented the dispossessed commoners or the rural England that was drowning or the old England that was passing. He represented something more than the persecuted peasant and rather less than the older England. What he did represent was the people who have no history but on whom all history depends.

Who are these people? The answer may be given in a story of Plutarch's about the Spartans. Their military allies complained that, though the Spartans were fewer in number than they were, they (the allies) were being perpetually dragged into one campaign after another. So King Agesilaus of Sparta held a review of all the troops both of the allies and of the Spartans and ordered to drop out of the ranks all those who were farmers and carpenters and builders and smiths and potters. So many of the allies' soldiers dropped out that their numbers became fewer than those of the Spartans, whose ranks never lost a man.

King Agesilaus was delighted, but he had little reason to be. It was because none dropped out of the Spartan ranks that Sparta left behind her nothing but a name for professional militarism. For these potters and smiths and carpenters and builders and farmers who have no history in any age or among any of the peoples of the world are nevertheless those who make it possible for the rest of the nation to have any history at all. It is when

the division between the historic and the unhistoric parts of a nation becomes too wide and deep, when the historic part disowns its origins in and dependence upon the unhistoric part that a nation's internal order and balance become disrupted. In Cobbett's time, the rift was opening; in our own it is all but complete.

It was these unhistoric people, the craftsmen and the cultivators, whom Cobbett represented. Their social structure changes in details but not in fundamentals. It is essentially timeless. We think of the first now as luxuries or museum pieces. But they are the makers of everything durable and seemly in our daily life, including, before "rationalised" industry displaced them, our motor-cars. We think of the second as proper to be industrialised like the workers of any other industry. But their business is with life at the fountain-head. These twain are the pillars of the nation, of all nations. Therefore Cobbett's championship of them is as timeless as they are. It was because these unhistoric people were oppressed and unhappy and being driven out of their vocations on and from the land that Cobbett foretold the dissolution of the historic element in the nation, the politicians, the bureaucrats, the intellectuals, the traders, and the dealers in money. Cutting itself off from its roots, England was committing biological suicide. It was because Cobbett saw a worse fate befalling his craftsmen and cultivators than had ever happened to them that he became their prophet. The only enduring health was by their restoration. If that was true in Cobbett's time, it is a hundred years truer to-day.

CHAPTER II

KENTISH COUNTRYMAN

"What you can do for yourself, my boy, when you grow up to be a man, never let anybody else do for you."

HANNAH TO HER SON, JOSEPH ARCH.

WHEN COBBETT DIED, a failure, he left his country just embarking, as it believed, upon the voyage of inevitable progress to the Fortunate Isles. When the subject of this chapter died in our generation, the end of that voyage had been reached, and the islands were seen to be only barren rock. In the hundred years between them both, our countryside was laid waste by the industrialism that Cobbett's age had hatched; its farming had gone bankrupt in peace and was being exploited towards the bankruptcy of its soils in war. Whether in peace or war, it had been emptied of its human cultivators. During the nineteenth century, farming had its periods of prosperity and depression. But after 1879 it went downhill without a pause until the two Great Wars of our century produced a temporary and artificial recovery at the expense of our soils. So the nation reached the end of that process of detachment from its own soil of which Cobbett saw the beginnings. A heavy price had been exacted—two million unemployed, two million derelict acres, a yearly doctor's bill heavier than the food-bill through malnutrition, a cycle of world-wars generated in part by a competition for foreign markets that was war in all but name. Cobbett would have felt that the great increase in the diseases of plants and animals was alone a justification for the prophecies his own contemporaries ignored.

The first of my Sons of Cobbett died at the age of seventy-one towards the middle of the nineteen thirties, when English agriculture reached the lowest ebb in all its history. Throughout his life, he struggled with every form of adversity that could have afflicted his circumstances—illness, poverty, transplantation, hardship, overwork, the caprice of employers. As his years lengthened, he suffered what was perhaps to him the heaviest of his burdens. Novelties began to break into his surroundings and the minds of

his associates, alien to his convictions and way of life. Yet he tenaciously clung to what he instinctively knew to be a wisdom based upon the fundamentals of living out of which he was never shaken. Since he left school at the age of eight and received no further education, he was as much self-taught in his rural professions as was Cobbett himself in his politics and *English Grammar*. He survived into a period when a well-known firm of provision merchants used to advertise for boys from secondary schools merely to pat up butter behind a counter.

But Murry's closeness to Cobbett was more integral than that. He possessed those qualities of self-help and self-respect, independence of character and devotion to his calling which are traditional to the English countryman. It was through his daughter that I heard of them and of him, so that the continuity of Cobbett's England may be said to have reached to the present time through the person and then the memory of this obscure Kentishman.

I have called him a Kentishman because his responsible working manhood was nearly all spent in Kent. But he was born in 1862 of an Essex family of ten, whose father was a highly skilled agricultural labourer of an intelligent and independent spirit. Like most of the labourers of the mid-nineteenth century, he would handle a dozen different jobs in a day, but, living in the eastern corn-belt, was a specialist in hand-reaping. His love and understanding of the land in which he had no stake at all made him view with deep distrust the advent of machinery into farming. He believed that it would hasten the drift from the land that had been flowing fast or slow ever since the Tudor Enclosures, and he knew that it damaged the straw and knocked the grain from the ear. But he had also a prophetic sense about it of whose fulfilment he reminded his son in later years. It was an instinctive perception of the path down which English agriculture was heading and of the disintegration of a former pattern of living which kept the land and its workers together.

Murry's own father's particular gift as a reaper he inherited from his father, who started work at the age of six and the pay of 6d. a week on one of the large Essex farms. He became a "lord"

of the harvest. That is to say, he was the foreman of the band of reapers, arranging for their food and rates of pay, heading them in the corn and setting the time for their strokes, the women following to tie the sheaves. He had never had but a fortnight at school and was taught to read and write by the farmer's daughter. The men lived in at the farmhouse and took their meals in the big kitchen. As the lord he received 12s. a week, and this enabled him to marry a Sheppey girl who could neither read nor write. But she wrote, as it were, with a needle, not a pen, making all the shepherds' and labourers' smocks at 1s. 6d. each and stitching the stylised devices which indicated their callings at the hiring fairs.

When my Kentishman was a small boy, his parents moved to Sheppey where the poverty of so large a family forced them to live chiefly on bread and vegetables. This sounds worse than it actually is. His father, who lived to seventy, hardly losing a tooth, spoke of the bread, gleaned by his wife and daughters from the fields and baked at home, as having more "stay" in it than the bread of modern times. The trouble was with the clothes rather than the food. The children went long journeys to and from school in bad weather, ill-clad and shod and, having no changes, steaming themselves dry by the fire. That and the endless strain on the mother to feed, clothe and keep her children converted her son, when he himself married, to the small family, to, as he said, quality for quantity.

The spirit of the family, handed down from its peasant forebears, induced the father to break from his utter dependence on the farmer and with no capital to set up as a master-thatcher. The boldness of the plunge paid him well; it relieved his family from the margin of subsistence and kept him in independent work till he was seventy. When he was twelve, his son joined him as his apprentice, after a four years' experience as "lock-boy" who gathered up all the stray wool at the sheep-shearing, and waggoner's boy who led both the waggon and the plough teams. He drew the yealms, packed them in the "jack," carried them up the ladder to his father and in time learned his father's mastery. This was his real education, for his father instructed him not only in his craft but in all the country sights and sounds the pair of them observed in their journeys across the bleak marshes of Sheppey. To and from a cottage, barn or rick to be thatched, they

would sometimes walk 16 miles a day. When the rains were heavy, the dykes overflowed and the narrow plank bridges were deep under water. Up to his knees in water, the master would first carry over his tools, feeling for his footing at each step, then return for his apprentice and bear him over on his back. Yet after such hardships and exposures, he had enough energy left to become a leading archer and slinger of an evening and roast the beans beaten out by the flail over the wood-fire.

This was Murry's life till he was twenty-three and had been married two years, living with his wife in a two-roomed cottage. But, going down with a pulmonary illness that spent his strength and his savings, he had to leave the winds and rains of Sheppey. Then began his long and arduous life in Kent, first as a coachman to a horse-fancier under the North Downs. His only experience of horses having been as a waggoner's boy, how did he succeed in jumping the preliminary stages of stable boy and groom? The walks over the searching miles of Sheppey must have been the answer that enriched his knowledge and understanding if they mastered his body. His father never missed a field or an animal or a farm in praise or criticism, in illustration and comparison, and he regarded his father as the wisest of men. In absorbing these wayside discourses into his receptive being, he became schooled in nature and husbandry and so equipped himself for a post for which he had no specialised qualifications at all. He transferred the attentiveness he had unconsciously acquired to his new master who in his turn taught him all *he* knew about horses and horsemanship. He became proficient not only in driving single, pair and tandem horses but in breaking young ones into saddle and carriage work, nursing them in sickness and judging their points. He thought nothing of sitting up all night with one that ailed and never reconciled himself in later life to their supersession by the motor-car.

Four years later, he took on the exacting business of assistant jobmaster on the estate of a lady of title in the next village, driving, running the stables, haymaking, looking after the meadowland, ordering the forage and auditing the accounts. Her ladyship was an autocratic philanthropist whose staff were black sheep or ex-prisoners, and he had the handling of them. For all this, as well as buying new horses at the London sales and coping with the benevolent despotism of his Lady Bountiful, he received

18s. a week. When he remarried after the loss of his first wife, his wage was increased to £1. Again his health broke after nine years of a series of ordeals which included night-driving in winter for the dances of her ladyship and her guests. These not infrequently behaved like Mr. Bob Sawyer and Mr. Benjamin Allen on their and Mr. Pickwick's journey north to interview Mr. Allen, Senior. He acquired a local reputation as a moonlight driver, the unworldly shadows cast by its beams making sensitive horses all nerves. Since all this entailed getting three hours in bed for several nights in a week, with all the responsibilities of the long daylight hours to be included, he had to obey the doctor and leave. Not before his Lady Catherine de Burgh had delivered a lofty lecture to his wife on his presumption in leaving.

He then became coachman to a private family whose head, a wealthy London solicitor, had made buying, running and leaving estates his hobby. In one way and another he served this family with one interval for the rest of his working life. His new master was fidgety and irascible, and at first Murry's mind was divided between how long he could put up with him and how long would he suit him. Rural unemployment then meant the workhouse, and he was torn between his natural independence and this spectre that haunted the mind of every dispossessed countryman. But when the restrictions and interferences culminated in the gov'nor shooting his cat (a good ratter) for walking on the lawn, he forgot his self-counsel of keeping his tongue between his teeth and wagged it to such purpose that he got an apology. Thenceforward, a mutual esteem and liking grew up between them. Nor did the long hours and heavy work affect his devotion to the family. Its members took him into its confidence and made him the repository of much of its personal difficulties and pains. He became in the end the godfather to his master's grandson.

The hours were long, from 6.30 a.m. to 9.30 p.m., together with night-work. But these troubled him less than the series of flittings from estate to estate, eight of them in all. For he was a man in whom the pride of work was all in all. The coats of the horses shone with flickering lights like the carriages and the harness room smelt of polish with sets of harness covering two walls, the saddles high on their trees on another, the burnished

steel bits and snaffles on a baize-covered boarding above the stove and the whips in a rack behind the door. The whips he always prepared himself before taking them to the village saddler to be stained and varnished and mounted in leather and silver. He would select straight long wands from the holly-trees in the shrubbery and trim and peel them till the wood was as white as it was round.

Yet he never used the whip, relying on his voice and pressure on the reins to manage his horses. Even on week-days their hooves were polished, but on Sundays their loose boxes were decorated with a wide fringe of plaited straw with the ears folded back and interwoven with red and blue braid. His thatching experience came in handy for these festival days, and he somehow found time for gladdening the barren flint-paved stable yard with a narrow flower border at one end. Living as he did above the hay-loft, he had no cottage garden of his own. But he remembered the cottage gardens of his forefathers. His vegetable garden he made for himself out of a piece of rough field at the far end of the estate. All this constructive work conflicted with his having to leave time and again at the volatile will of his master. This was a burden more severe to him than 15 hours work for 6 days of the week with not enough time at his meals to talk to his wife and daughter.

Then the motor-car invaded his cherished stables and drove out the horses. He left the post of chauffeur-mechanic to another and on the next move to a new estate was given that of a working bailiff. This shortened his hours to 12 a day but left him poorer in income, lacking the visitors' tips and the discounts on the stable bills. But his new estate duties offered him the golden opportunity of reclaiming it from dereliction, particularly as the absence of the family in London for six months of the year left him in free charge of it. The estate became his all but the ownership, and his peasant stock gave him the chance of redeeming decay into order and fruitfulness, waste into economy and interdependence. He had to look after the poultry, control the ubiquitous rabbits, reclaim the meadowland, supervise the felling, fence-making and hop-pole cutting of several acres of woodland and lay out a formal Dutch garden without having been taught the elements of geometry. This he accomplished with measure and line from a scale drawing. But what he most enjoyed was the forestry in

which he could combine the making of poles and chestnut paling with the husbandry of the woods.

He devoted himself the more eagerly to such stewardship because through it he brought himself into contact with one of the special arts of Kentish farming, that of the hop-yards. The estate was in the heart of the hop and fruit country on the rag-stone hills above the Valley of the Medway, and he was quick to acquire all the details of ploughing, cultivating, manuring, picking and drying the hops. But what most interested him was the experiment of an orchardist in growing hops and soft fruit among his trees which he manured with cartloads of old rags. The current assumption, that a traditional landsman will never look at a novelty, is contradicted by the very nature of "old-fashioned" husbandry. It was always intensive, particularly among the peasants, so that any empirical device to increase the yield and variety of crops and persuade one to interact with another will always catch the eye and ear of the husbandman. His suspicion is for the extensive farmer of our own days.

Murry's master having died while he was feeding on this new knowledge, the son sold the estate and, desiring to become a farmer, bought another with a farm attached near Tonbridge. The pang of being uprooted once more was the less acute in this instance because he had made himself unpopular in the village for defending one of the London hop-pickers whom he, like the rest of the neighbours, regarded as "the lowest of the low." But if they were a poor lot, they were made to pay for their unmannerly intrusion in a way that brought their exploiters more discredit than the worst of their offences merited. They were fleeced by the shopkeepers, sold inferior food and forced to lodge in unventilated insanitary hovels by whole families and in conditions that no farm animal had to endure. Regarded as the legitimate prey of all who had dealings with them, they excited the pity of their defender who met with the righteous indignation commonly meted out to those who question the justice of judges.

It was one of the ironies of life that this man, who had hitherto served others in a variety of occupations for which he had no training nor inherited aptitude, should have found his true vocation on a farm in surroundings the reverse of authentically rural. The country was flat and dull and the village had parted with most of its traditional grace. The inhabitants worked either at the local

brewery or at a factory making gramophone needles, while the housewives did a thriving business in baby farming for the Waifs and Strays Society. But, being made bailiff on a farm of 130 acres by the son of his old master, he found himself in his element. It was a mixed farm with only a few milking cows but well stocked with bullocks and calves for fattening. The star of the farm was a herd of Yorkshire Middle White pedigree pigs and it also ran flocks of hurdled sheep and geese. Since the farmer grew his own fodder crops, the farm supported the animals and the animals supported the farm. Trifolium was grown and deep-rooting plants like sainfoin and linseed kept the land in as good heart as the beasts in good health. The geese pastured the orchard and the folded ewes fertilised the land for the corn crops. Having charge of all this variety in an interlocked and interchanging economy of self-maintenance, our hero entered as it were upon his heritage.

Yet the only practical experience he had had to equip him for this new and onerous responsibility were the comments and homilies of his father on his walks with him across the Sheppey marshes. These and his own observations of the farming scene drifting past him from his perch on the coachman's box gave him a start. He supplemented them by talks snatched with farmers and farm-labourers from his own exacting labours. These were his only credentials for managing a self-supporting and so complex farm. His father possessed hardly more when he broke away from being a farm-hand to become a master-thatcher. He not only did manage the farm but brought it round from a makeshift neglect to an organism in full health. Every evening he walked round it after his work-hours with as much attentiveness as if it had been his own. Nor was his regard only for its fertility and prosperity but also for its beauty. When his daughter came home on a visit when the linseed was in flower, she was to be sure, he said, to go and see it at midday when it would be at its best.

But the farmer-son who had made Murry his bailiff was a business man before he was a farmer. Immediately after the armistice of 1918, he smelt what was in the political wind and sold up the farm for a good price well before the *débauche* of agriculture after the Repeal of the Corn Production Act in 1921. With nothing but a small annuity settled on him by the family, his bailiff found himself workless and forced to live in cheap

lodgings in Tonbridge. Though he was close upon sixty, he contrived to pick up a gardener's job at Hadlow, near where he had once been coachman. His master drank so heavily that he was at more or less liberty to make what he could of the garden. He did so well with it that his strawberries, asparagus and celery became the talk of the neighbourhood. He invented a method of his own in pruning roses and fruit-trees that earned him prizes in the flower-shows. Then, some years later, the farmer-son of his old master summoned his bailiff back again to take part in an experiment in poultry-farming at Hawkhurst, on the Kent-Sussex border. The house was a water-mill of the regional brick and white weather-boarding with a roof of weathered and lichened tiling, tucked away in a deep valley overarched with oak. He had an orchard and garden to look after as well as a couple of hundred chickens, a flock of geese and some ducks, and his home was a comfortable one in the granary to the mill, built on brick piers with open linhays below.

Here surely was an end of wanderings and vicissitudes, of uprootings and swift changes of fortune; here a man could be at peace and cultivate his garden before taking the last journey of all. And for a time all went well, the gov'nor working enthusiastically beside him and ventilating ideas about making the place a self-supporting unit to feed the family which he, the thrifty son of Cobbett, delighted to test and practice. Here his daughter, working in a town, received her adult education in country life from her walks with her father at the week-ends over the steep hills and down the twisting lanes, windmills above and water-mills below. In these he took a deep interest and instructed her in the mechanism of the different types, particularly the windmill at Sandhurst which had five sweeps. But almost before he could realise it, his interest had become an antiquarian one, the centuries-old mills, like card-houses, one after another falling derelict.

So his own life fell away from this pleasant place less than two years after he had settled there. The gov'nor, in short, changed wives. Though both wife-to-be and wife-that-was confided in him together with the husband and all in an atmosphere of amicable arrangement, that did not save the mill from being sold and him leaving it. In this instance, the widow of his original master and the mother of the poultry-farmer came to his rescue and installed him in a cottage on the downs above Aylesford.

There he became the gardener of four acres, with cherry and apple trees down the slope and still chickens and geese for him to ward among them. There, too, for the first time in his life, he had the chance, though approaching the seventies, of making a cottage garden of his own out of the rubble and lime and trodden earth the builders had left after putting up the cottage. In less than three years it thrived with flowers and vegetables, and under his care plants and beasts never failed to thrive.

But just as soon as he had made his patch of desert blossom and was turning the corner of the seventies, thrombosis and phlebitis lamed him for life. Though the annuity was slightly increased, he had to leave his cottage to make room for another worker, and this broke his heart. Had he been permitted to stay on without pay and, in return for his cottage, supervise the four acres by shuffling round them, he might well have survived for many years. But to be alive unwanted, with idle hands and fruitless schemes was intolerable to such a man. His daughter, now married and living at Hastings, found her parents a flat in the town high enough for them to look out on the sea. He was far too independent to make his home with her. But in less than a year he was dead.

This Kentish countryman who died only a dozen years ago lived Cobbett's counsels probably without ever having heard of him. Leaving school at the age of eight, he had to master "the three Rs" as well as a variety of professions that would have taxed the full strength and abilities of half a dozen men, even with the preliminary training and technical instruction that he lacked. Yet he could audit accounts, organise his estate work on paper as well as in the field and write letters without apparent difficulty. It was a peculiarity of his letters that he spelt himself with an "i"; the sole survivor of the great chair-makers of the eighteenth century whom I personally know does just the same. He seemed totally unaware of his extraordinary versatility, exercised without the slightest forewarning or preparation. What carried him through was pride in the worth of the work which never considers the sacrifices it may and with him did exact. This crowned him

with that natural dignity that, so his daughter told me, all who knew him remarked.

His powers of observation gave him a natural scholarship, like W. H. Hudson's, shot through with emotion. When he took his walks with his daughter, "a look of ineffable pleasure," she said, came upon his face when he spied a lusty crop or animals with vigour in their limbs and a sheen on their coats. A field choked with mayweed or "cadlick" (charlock) gave him as much distress as though the land were his own. Slovenly or short-cut farming he abhorred, and he was a stout advocate of the mixed farm, becoming more and more old-fashioned. He maintained that mixing crops and beasts was the only way to farm in this country, whatever they might do in Canada. A fourfold rotation of crops, arable sheep, a return of all waste products to the land and no stinting of labour was his idea both of good farming and farming that would pay. He disapproved of artificial fertilizers on the ground that, though they might have their uses as a fillip, they put no goodness into the earth. Machines, he believed, never did the work so thoroughly as men, even if they did it with less labour and in fewer hours. The farmers who were obdurate about raising their labourers' wages were, he maintained, the more likely to exploit their land.

His grasp of a topographical pattern was exceptionally quick and sure. Though he never studied an ordnance map in his life, his mind made the map of a new district and kept it there years after leaving it. The coachman's box aided him in picking up the landmarks, getting his bearings and linking up the whole composition. But his acute sense of direction was an inward guide, inherited not only from the traditional countryman but the primitive ancestry of us all. He knew every tree, whether in or out of leaf and all the birds. Many of these he recognised by note without seeing them, or by flight at a distance, and he was a champion of birds for their services to crops as well as for the animation and felicity they imparted to the scene. Of wild flowers he had no more than average knowledge but an uncommon delight in them. A deep dark lane lit by countless glow-worms, a field of flax in bloom, a pair of grey wagtails by a stream, wild daffodils in a spinney at Hawkhurst, these sights were printed on his memory and their page was turned and returned in his talk.

He not only took the same pleasure in the vernacular buildings of Kent, the tile-hanging, the weatherboarding, the mellow roofs and colour-washed walls, but associated them with the face of nature. The warm blend of nature's and man's contributions was English country. But his attitude was never the merely picturesque. Unless the building was a serviceable one it did not please him. He had lived too near the reality of dark rooms, cramped space and leaking roofs to detach them from utility and enjoy them as "quaint." The modern jerry-built houses springing up everywhere like red scale on a tree-bole he disliked on the same grounds—"they will have tumbled down before they are paid for." His taste was for the solid and substantial, the craftsman's for durability, whether in houses, furniture, or clothes. He possessed a few pieces of old furniture, handed down from his father and his first wife, and on no account would he part with them, even when he had tempting offers in times of special need. His clothes were of the best he could afford, he himself always brushing them when out of use. The same scrupulousness was extended to his work-hardened hands which he scoured with silver-sand.

The balance of his character saved him from bigotry towards others in his self-denials. The Puritanical streak in him might but for that balance have turned him into a domestic tyrant. He had strong views of the importance of the husband as the head of the house and in it his word was law. Yet his wife had the management of his tiny income and his whole confidence and affection. His opinion of women was high but not romantic, and he could not bear to hear men speak slightly of their wives nor discuss their married lives with others. He had a paramount sense of the family and was opposed to married women going out to work: either they became drudges or neglected their husbands and children. At the risk of offending his employers, he would never permit his wife to work in the "Big House." If she did the laundering of fine articles for them and jam-making, it was because they were done at home. The economic drive towards the factory of both women and men he believed would lead to the degradation of both and in the name of emancipation.

In the hop and fruit region of mid-Kent, it was the custom and condition before and up to the last war for the wives of newly engaged labourers to work in the fields. In February stringing the

hop-gardens began; In October the last of the cobnuts were gathered and the women had to crawl on the damp earth under the umbrella-shaped trees to pick up the fallen ones. The women fastened the lower ends of the strings to the hop-poles and the men on stilts the higher. It was the women who planted the "sets" for a new hop-garden, tied the hops to the strings when they reached the proper height, and, when higher, stripped off the lower leaves which were as rough as emery paper. They were paid at the rate of 3d. per 100 "hills," each hill having 4 bines. The men were so miserably paid that the extra money earned by their wives and at the hop- and fruit-picking also by their children was a great boon to them. But though Murry, who was only one small step above the hop-workers, recognised this easing of the economic burden, he believed that gang labour for women in the fields would ultimately mean servile labour in the factory. Anything that tended to loosen the ties of the family meant a breach in the Englishman's castle of independence.

His kindness to his children stopped short of indulgence. They learned to obey him and not to be afraid of work. Like the parent birds at the nest, he was for them leaving home early. Leave it they did at fifteen and sixteen, but in full knowledge that what they left was home and of the welcome awaiting them on their periodic returns. They took with them this triple counsel—"never do anything you'd be ashamed for us to know," "never talk about one work-mate to another" and "never buy anything you can't afford to pay cash down for." He had a horror of debt and the hire-purchase system.

Much as he had suffered from the restlessness and high-handedness of his employers, he deeply regretted the decline of the aristocracy and landed gentry and the sight of their estates reduced to beggary by death duties. If Victorian and Edwardian estate-service was a despotism, it was seldom other than benevolent, and he could see nothing to take the place of the landed estate but the plutocracy that did take it. It vexed him hard to see good land going for building sites and the London business man aping the country gentleman and robbing the land through lack of understanding of it. In his long working life he had encountered many examples of the authentic gentry who identified their lives with the interest of the land and the village. He saw them being driven out and their places usurped by rich men

with no stake in either, but with the strongest possible interest in their own importance. Cobbett had watched and thundered against the same thing half a century before.

From exactly the same point of view, Murry was shocked at the over-running of the home markets by foreign produce. In the last year of his life, when he was living on the smallest income he had had for years and for the first time during that life had to buy all his greenstuff, he vehemently approved the proposed tariff on French vegetables. When it was objected that it would increase the price for them to the consumer, he replied that, poor as he was, he would rather pay it than help to ruin the English grower. With his pittance he would buy nothing but English meat. He had had plenty of opportunity for noticing how the growers of mid-Kent barely cleared their expenses in the prices they got for produce often charged in the shops four, five and six times greater. It stirred his country blood to an almost bitter heat that the producer should be giving way all along the line to the distributor. His daughter's husband told him of a book by Henry Ford professing that the English climate and the English farm were totally unsuited to the growing of wheat. It would be much more economic to leave it to America to grow it for us with cheapness and efficiency. This was heresy to him. Remembering the fine harvests of his youth, he refused to argue upon high finance and economic theories; his deepest instincts recoiled from such abstractions. The home-land could produce the best wheat in the world if the farmers farmed it properly and were paid a fair price for it.

He was cruelly overworked all his life. His roots were always being severed when they had attached themselves to a new soil, and he never attained the one ambition of his life, a small place of his own. Yet he was not an unhappy man. Too honest to save sufficient to buy one and too conscientious to start on borrowed money, he found his satisfaction in tending the property of others. His pleasures were the Kentish countryside and he had too much to occupy him ever to be bored. His best years were when he was farm-bailiff, for such was the call of his blood, and his attachment to animals lightened his lot. Dogs and horses he could do anything with, and the dogs followed him away from their owners. When a bobtailed sheepdog of his master's was sold, it went frantic with recognition of him years later in Tonbridge

Market. A plainness and even sternness in his character reminds one that the English countryman comes of a mixed religious strain, the Catholic of penance and pageantry, fast and festival, the Puritan of a harsher metal. That he changed over from chapel to church showed him to be not too rigidly moulded by either, and the goodness of his Creator was his real faith. He who had known hunger as a child was "truly thankful" for a sufficiency. And there was always English country and his skill to make it fruitful.

Of such were the makers of the English land, no less obscure and memorable than the masons of the churches, manors, market halls, farmsteads and cottages. Others directed and finally repressed them, but of the green mansion we know as England they with Nature were the builders.

III

"Kentish Countryman," though descended in the direct line from Cobbett's agricultural labourers, possessed certain qualities not different from theirs but magnified. This raised him above them. He enlarged his powers not by security and ownership but by the exercise of responsibility. Mrs. Hubbard, on the other hand, a fellow-villager of my own, has stubbornly remained in person and in station the peasant she began. She was ninety this year but it has made very little difference to her normal activities. On some market days she still walks $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the market town, does her shopping and walks $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles back again to the cottage where she was born in a magnificent four-poster bed with lustre-ware and Wedgwood round the room. But her cottage, though it fits her like a glove, looks worse for wear than she. Her hair is her own, but the thatch on her cottage roof is no longer the same as what her father, a notable thatcher, put on, she standing by to draw out the yealms and carry them up the ladder. Up to the war, we had one of the best thatchers I have ever met. Just as the eighteenth century bucks made the Grand Tour on the Continent, so he made the Grand Tour to Norfolk to learn Norfolk reed-thatching. The thatched roof of her cottage is his, but she will not have it compared with her father's, and she was his assistant for many years.

A thunderstorn cracked the leaded panes of her cottage windows a few years ago and pieces of the whitewash on the walls keep falling out, showing the rubble underneath. But, though she has grown old along with it, nobody would guess that she is nearing her century. She lives alone, though her son, a local farmer, pays her a daily visit. She does all her own chores and cooking, even making pastry occasionally for my household. It is rich and flakey, unlike the crazy-paving slabs supplied by up-to-date hotels. She would still make her own wines if she could get the sugar; after a glass of one of them out of her store, you have to be careful on a slippery day. She draws her own water from the well and thinks nothing of sallying forth after a gale to pick up the twigs and branches torn from the trees, as she used to think nothing of twisting the hay-bonds with the wimble for her father, knee-deep in snow. When she was eight she worked in the fields and, when she was seventy, brought up a Barnardo child—her seventeenth. From what she has told me, she was neither stern nor indulgent with them. Now they are cutting down the hedgerow elms and ashes and the hardwoods of the coppice that surround her cottage, and the crash of each tree sounds like another nail driven into the coffin of old England. But she goes on with her household offices, tending her ducks and chickens, making her dog comfortable, curing her son's bacon, compounding her herbs, cake-making, cooking, going to market, picking up wood and delivering her views on the frightfulness of the modern world just as though the old England out of which she came would not and could not die.

She has seen many changes. She remembers names and cottages which have vanished as utterly as those they housed. She remembers the village feast which sprang out of the mediæval Whitsun Ale, with her mother cooking all day for the bandsmen and the singers and all the "jovial crew," but never grudging it for the liveliness of the occasion. She recalls her mother's weekly baking of flour in the cottage oven that she has shown me. It was brought from one of the two mills of the village whose very sites are now vanished. She recollects nearly eighty years ago walking to the same market-town to fetch the malt and hops of the home-brew whose recipe Cobbett gave in *Cottage Economy*.

She remembers, too, Joseph Arch, who came our way in '72 to fetch a hundred of the labourers out of their own country into

Australia, because for their manifold skills their country (which had previously taken their land away from them) could only afford ten shillings a week. And she was born at one of the turning points of English history, namely in the decade that fathered the General Enclosure Act that destroyed the peasantry and foundation of that old England whence she came. The England of self-help, a multitude of small properties and a great culture. She, standing at her cottage door in the fading November light, is strangely reminiscent of a nursery rhyme in the shawl wrapped round her angular shoulders, in her slightly stooping figure and deeply wrinkled face. And in a sense she is legendary because in her independence, her aloneness, her defiance of all the years and the changes, her caustic opinions ("well, anyroad, they can't touch the sun, the moon and the stars"), her determination to shift for herself to her last breath and her dumb passion for the home where she was born, she might be taken as an emblem of that working country England whose twilight her long years have seen.

CHAPTER III

THE COUNTRY WORKMAN

"Freedom means scope for the individual member of society to plan his life, to express himself, to find an outlet for the creative energy which God has given him and so develop his personality with the minimum of restriction from the offices of the Government of that society. . . . We have turned our backs on that conception and are marching away from it."

S. SAGAR.

WE STOOD by the farm-gate, the small farmer, the carpenter-builder and I, and talked about the village crafts. What killed them, said the farmer, was when the son, educated at a school away from home, deserted his father's trade. When he was brought up on the farm or in the workshop, that is to say, at home, he absorbed his father's trade soon after his mother's milk. His father would go away on a job and put his son in charge, or his son would do the odd jobs until he was ready to step into his father's shoes. This simple process was the most effective method of linking up family with livelihood, home with work. It preserved the one through its interaction with the other. It was thus a continued guarantee, through the interdependence of the crafts with agriculture as the common focus of them all, of the stability and vitality of the organic village or small township. It was, too, a vocational training which kept the balance between hand and brain and fused character and responsibility with skill. Though it conferred the freedom of expressing "creative energy," it was a freedom controlled by the needs of the local community and the discipline of the home.

To this unity between creation and continuity the modern scene has been consistently hostile. Consequently, industrialism has not contented the worker, be his wages high or low, and the drift is right away from personal responsibility. The relationship between father and son, master and apprentice, home and trade,

is, by preserving that responsibility, part of the timeless order of society. In terms of former piety, it was ordained by God.

Every country workman who is something more than a mechanic has two primary endowments, an organic relation with the earth and an hereditary proficiency. I take as my first example a jobbing gardener of very limited intelligence. He is a man incapable of abstract thought and would make an indifferent witness in a court of law. When he has any information to give, he usually repeats it four times, not only to make quite sure that what he has to say is not missed but that he himself has got it right. He would take an hour to read the page of a book. To give cogent reasons for the right principles of husbandry he holds would be as much beyond him as for him who fetched the worm for Cleopatra to grasp why she wanted it. Yet his instinctive familiarity with the laws of nature is profound.

I received recently a load of mixed timber for firewood which this man cut up with and for me. It consisted of unstripped poles, 12-16 feet long, ready for sawing into logs. All these he distinguished and named at once. Not only so but whether the trees from which the timber came had been saplings or full-grown and whether before felling they had grown in sunshine or shade. The maple, for instance, has deeper corrugations and is paler in tone if the sun has struck upon it. He could identify one species of log from another simply by striking the two together, the harder woods like whitethorn having a crisper and more percussive note than the softer. Barks like whitethorn and field maple, that in the pole look indistinguishable, he knew apart by the more flakiness of the former. Ash is easier because it nearly always betrays itself by the pittings of the burrowing beetle, while even a novice in wood-lore could hardly fail to recognise a whitethorn pole from its flattened and slightly fluted bole. In time he would gather that the silvery wash over a corrugated pole, not unlike the tone of Kentish old dressed oak, revealed a sapling of hedge-elm.

But this man knew a rotten log which lacks this silveriness to be elm, not by the bark but the cup-shaped markings where the wood had broken off. Concentric red lines in the flesh of a sawn portion were a sign to him of damson or sloe. But though the lines of both are red and semi-circular, he never confused sloe with damson. Damson, again, resembles buckthorn in possessing these

concentric rings, but buckthorn only on one-half of the bole, the half that has faced the sun. Though buckthorn is not a common hedgerow tree in my neighbourhood, he never made a mistake about it in the pole. Other woods he would know by the stickiness or sponginess of their resistance to the saw, very different from the whitethorn that offers a smooth and clean cut. Others, again, he would know by the mosaic of the bark corrugations, others by their habit of growth, undiscerned even by the naturalist or the forester who would understand the growing tree but not the pole. He could even tell the age of a tree from which the pole had been chopped by the differences between the sides and centre of a sawn portion. What is more wonderful, he was never beaten by logs or poles even when their bark had been stripped, though he had to think twice when they were beech or ash.

Knowledge of this kind, which verges on the mysterious, cannot be acquired by learning to identify one tree from another, whether standing or felled. It is derived from a certain inborn sympathy, strengthened by habitual observation, with the very pulse of natural growth itself. It divines nature's own indwelling pattern of life which, like the human pattern distinct from but allied to it, reflects the Natural Law.

What this sympathy with the natural material can be is illustrated from this passage in a letter to me from H. E. Goodchild, the chair-maker.¹ I had written telling him of a New Zealander who wanted to make Windsor chairs: "It would be nice to know what kinds of wood he uses out there. I feel i would like to be out there . . . and show him a few of the little things i have had to find out for myself. I can imagine him being just as interested as i was making work a real pleasure and not something that makes you just tired." The "i" is significant. The material and the work upon it come before the ego.

Nor was this hereditary and organic relationship with the earth, the very root-system of a nation, lost when the country workman migrated to the town. So long, of course, as he remained a craftsman. Of this I heard a striking instance from Birmingham. A friend of mine found there an old man knowledgeable enough to tune a clavichord. His father had been a piano-maker and he had served a nine years' apprenticeship under him. Once a year, he went with his father into Gloucestershire

¹ See my *Men of Earth*.

to buy beech wood, used for the peg frames and needing to be of the hardest quality. His father always bought his timber standing and selected trees growing on a slope facing north and only on a certain soil and site. The reason for this was because the tree "must not have grown up too quick," and the bole had to be in such a position as to be protected from exposure to much rain. The son held the modern cheap piano in contempt and refused to do any work on it. Though his father actually lived in a town, it is clear that he practised the customary principle of rural craftsmanship in controlling his material from its natural source to the finished article.

But the most eloquent example I know of this inborn and indwelling principle comes from Droitwich where lives a cabinet-maker named Fowkes. For in him it has become conscious and part of his philosophy of life. He made a small oval hand-mirror in mahogany scrap-wood for the wife of a friend of mine. When my friend called for it, he disclosed his belief that the crafts were originally divinely bestowed and the gifts had ever since been passed on from father to son. In support of this hereditary theory he told my friend that his grandfather on the mother's side was renowned in his day as being one of the finest workers in veneer and inlay in England. He himself had known nothing about veneer work. One day he "felt the itch" to do it and immediately and with ease, so he said, accomplished it. Having discovered that no trial and error nor self-teaching were necessary, he derived his proficiency from his grandfather.

Through the offices of this friend, I have myself had the privilege of listening to Fowkes's recollections in one of the older back-streets of Droitwich where he lives and has his workshop. All these craftsmen belong to a kind of secret fraternity. It is unacknowledged but the strongest bond of all because it is founded on a common likeness and a common attitude to life. Almost from the very moment I met Fowkes, I recognised him. He belonged. With all their individual differences of character, circumstance and trade, few and widely scattered as they are, they possess the same faith, the same integrity, the same love of nature, the same unworldliness, the same absorption in their work, the same modest pride in it. The same resignation to an alien world is theirs, the same quietism, whether the character itself be lively or subdued. A fractional fraction of the population as they are,

they are a whole civilisation in themselves. The beauty, simplicity and concord of their lives is caught in the overtones of those exquisite folk-songs which the piety and labour of a few men like Cecil Sharpe and Charles Marson saved just before they vanished, like the craftsmen themselves, into oblivion. Since I knew others of them I knew Fowkes, though I only talked for half an hour to this placid, white-haired, gentle-voiced, reflective worker in woods.

Nor is this impression of a distinct community of individuals, separated in place but united in spirit, mine alone. Shortly after my visit to Droitwich I received a book—*Peaks and Lamas* by a Greek writer and mountaineer, Marco Pallis—whose account of Tibetan psychology, religion and rural life is the most penetrating I have read. Speaking of the two best silversmiths of Khunu in Bashahr, where the native peasant-art is still uncorrupted by modern industrialism, the author writes:

“They both had a fine presence, typical of master craftsmen the world over. That profession, with its happy blend of head and hand, the intellectual and the practical, seems to select the best type of humanity, and its members might well style themselves the salt of the earth. Their extinction, under the pressure of the modern industrialism that is overrunning the Orient, must be regarded as a social, no less than an artistic, disaster.”

But master-craftsmanship did not so much “select the best type of humanity” as present all that practised it with the opportunity, rarely missed, of becoming so.

In the short time I was with Fowkes, he told me a good deal about his father’s father, a small yeoman. This yeoman lived till he was eighty-six and had a mixed farm with cattle and sheep. Not before he was an old man did he ever drive plough upon it. He cultivated his acres entirely by digging, which of course is the very best way of cultivation. Year by year this farmer dug the red marl of Worcestershire like a gardener, broadcasted his crops on the tilth and in the winter threshed them with a flail. In spite of such toils as emulated the giant race before the industrial flood, he found time to walk three miles to and from Droitwich on market-day. For this extraordinary man was no primitive serf fettered by modern fancy to the soil: he was an independent Victorian yeoman who rejected the plough for the spade because he preferred it and deemed it more salutary for his land.

His son, the father of the cabinet-maker of to-day, was an all-round farm-carpenter and builder. Anything to do with wood on the farm he did, from horses' hames to farm-gates, from ladders to plough-beams. He also made timber-frames in the black-and-white idiom of the region, the skeleton being left for a year to avoid shrinkage before the brick infillings. The bricklayer then came along and laid not three hundred bricks a day in modern style but a thousand. And these cottages cost £120 apiece, not as in our times £900 or £1000. In order to live at all in the revolutionary conditions of our age, the present Fowkes had to become a specialist. Except in memory, the family inheritance and the continuity of creation, the connections with the land were severed and he came to live in a town and with mahogany. The beauty of his work and the fineness of its finish I could see for myself; through his words I was enabled to snatch a glimpse into the past of the contemporary craftsman who so precariously survives. With him as with so many others that past is rooted in the land. It is, of course, with most of our urban populations whose work is now from the office-chair or at the assembly line. But the clerk and the machine-minder have forgotten their ancient ties with the land, as Cobbett perceived a century ago; the craftsman, even when his work is remote from it, has never forgotten them.

My next meeting with Fowkes was a happy accident: we both converged at one and the same time, he from Droitwich and I from home, upon Harvington Hall in the pleasant parish of Chaddesley Corbett, east of Kidderminster. There could not have been a meeting place more richly evocative of the spirit of English craftsmanship.

Harvington Hall, the original home of the fifteenth century Pakingtons, is one of the most romantic of the great moated houses of England, a patchwork of the building prowess of three eras, mediæval, Tudor and the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is a maze of rooms great and small, closets, library, withdrawing-room, banqueting hall, great hall on the first floor, chapel on the second, kitchen, buttery, malthouse and others, many of them wainscoted and with exquisite panelling to the doors. It has many cunning hiding places and it is unique for the number and variety of its decorative wall-paintings.

But what concerns me here is that it is one of the most singular and significant monuments to the continuity of creation in the

land. The earliest examples of the friezes—fruit, foliage, mythological figures, trellis-patterns, grotesques, worthies and others—are mediæval, and the tradition, originally derived from the painted churches, is exuberantly caught up by the Worcestershire rendering of Renaissance neo-classicism. A casing of Elizabethan brick enclosed the mediæval timber-frame, surmounted by a moulded Tudor chimney whose loftiness and site draw the rambling structure together. Once more the building was remodelled and reconditioned at the close of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries. The mediæval masons, carpenters and joiners themselves reconstructed the house before their work in its turn was reconstructed.

Each period made its own contribution in its own way without the slightest regard for the architectural orthodoxy of its predecessor. The total effect to-day shows that these variations in style and fashion had enriched rather than confused the unity of the composition. They were all so many novelties and experiments *within* the English tradition of building. Because that tradition was maintained and constantly refreshed by new ideas, the informal whole remains a work of art.

Fowkes was employed on the work of restoring this noble house from utter ruin. I saw with my own eyes what he had done. For one thing he had rescued and renewed an exceptionally fine Queen Anne chair with a lyre-shaped back among the beautiful furniture. For another, he has remade the fragment found in the moat of a three-seated monk's bench with backs sliding to form a table, a most delicate and difficult achievement. But his chief work has been to rebuild the great staircase which had been removed. All that Fowkes had to go by were photographs and the painted imitations of the newel-posts, strings and balusters on one side of the staircase well. Yet the original wood-master who had made the original staircase would not recognise the present one as other than his own.¹ It would be hard to find a more eloquent testimony to the timelessness of craftsmanship.

¹ I have heard of a similar, if not so wonderful, an achievement by the father of a stone-carver at Exeter. He has made facsimiles of the cathedral stones destroyed in the Baedeker raid on Exeter indistinguishable from the originals.

This brings me back to my conversation at the gate with the small farmer and the carpenter-builder. The mass-execution of country industries following the Industrial Revolution first exalted mass over individual production, then the dealer over the producer and finally finance over all. In several villages, for instance, the population declined by 90 per cent, while the closing down of the stone-grinding country mills (some 20,000 of them) alone impoverished or put out of action smithying, carpentering, sack-making, the casting of metal and brass (for replacements), leather-tanning (for belting), mill-wrighting, stone-dressing and timbering.

As we talked, I could see how it had happened with this family and that family in my own village. Old Pearce was once a wheelwright, but the demand for waggons and carts had so dwindled that he was forced to turn himself into a coal-merchant. His son, inheriting his father's craftsmanly bent, became a smith in the days when arable was falling down to rough pasture. There being no farm-horses left to be shod, he took to carrying his father's coals. The carpenter had changed over to a jobbing builder and had entered the maelstrom of cut-throat competition between the local builders for tenders at the price either of sweated labour or shoddy materials or both. From making farm-gates he took to running up council houses. Their dry-rot, draughts, flimsiness, the doubling of the heat in summer and the cold in winter he described with a pert bitterness very unusual in a craftsman.

How often and with but slight deviations in circumstances could this tale be repeated! Many a letter I have had from ex-craftsmen whose prefix was none of their doing and who longed to be rid of it. I quote from one of these:

"Leaving the village school at 13 I followed in Cobbett's footsteps for a time by working as a crow-starver-cum-plough-boy. Later I was apprenticed to the local wheelwright for 6 years. During this period the crafts suffered a gradual eclipse with the result that—at the end of it—I was forced to seek a living elsewhere and in another direction. In passing, I would

like to say that few tasks in the world demand the same individual skill and craftsmanship—and give the same satisfaction when done—as that required to make a wheel.”

He entered the motor trade and so led an urban life for twenty years. Such men never forget the trade they once pursued and the rural environment in which they worked. Their lives have been permanently dislocated and they can never be other than misfits in modern urban society.

Here is another, but this man escaped:

“I am a countryman. Birth, breeding and inclination all make the town repulsive to me. As a boy, I was encouraged to try for something ‘better’ than farming or farm work. I did, and by becoming a local government officer and working in an office—plus three years’ soldiering in the last war—I managed to ruin my eyes and health. Then, when I realised I was trying to force a countryman into town, I threw it up, bought a little bit of wood and a wooden bungalow. By that time I had no money to farm with and no health to work with; that is, in the sense of taking a job. It turned out for the best (things usually do). I became a free-lance writer and now, after 15 years, I still have my bit of land. I can make a fairish living and, above all, I live in the country and have time to get on to my land and to take part in local affairs. I can even claim to be something of a craftsman. I have taught myself (or, perhaps you would say, I have remembered) how to lay a hedge, fell a tree, graft, prune and crab. I can’t thatch, but hope to have a shot at it next year. I have plastered (I am clearing some hazel for laths but so far have used metallic lathing for an urgent job). I have built a brick arch and open hearth, put up a chimney, laid drains, a hundred-and-one odd jobs which are worth doing *for* the doing. And I have made a good many of my own tools. Cleaving-axe, an improved hedge-slasher, a holly-wood maul (or beadle) and a weather-vane complete, including a man, horse and plough cut from sheet iron.”

Men like these might be the leaven to leaven our industrial lump. But the weight of the age is against them, and year by year they become fewer and fewer.

The farmer took up the tale with an account of the new thatching machines, which produce an article like a sheet of matting that lasts for a year and wastes more straw than it uses. Both these men spoke with derision of, and a chilly scorn for, the profit-hunting and expediency of modern methods that took the very sunshine out of the day and made the living of it "weary, stale, flat and unprofitable." I edged them away from such talk to their memories, and instantly the east wind went out of the atmosphere, the sun warmed us and the pettiness of life was strained off as through a sieve.

The carpenter-builder described how he had made oak window-frames and how the moulding was done. Once he had been a pargeter¹—pargeting is traditional in my neighbourhood, though rare—but from a mould, not by pricking and combing on a damp surface. He had done wheel-wrighting too, taking down the yellow and red hoop-raved Woodstock waggon, used with the more local make in these parts, and re-building it but leaving out the chamfering and dishing of the wheels. He did not grind his own colours as the older wheel-wrights used to do, and he took days at the job where they were wont to take weeks. This was not because they were slow workers, but because they did much more to the waggons as artists to whom scamping (by which this man had to live) was unknown. He, like so many others, had lived in a transitional period between the unity of art and trade, beauty and use and the segregation of art from commercialism.

Country memory still enshrines the reputation of great wheel-wrights. One of them was Pike of Tinhead, dead for many years. I was moving about in Wiltshire with a small party engaged on a farming survey. We came to a very lonely farm on the high Downs near Imber which, as I knew it years ago, was one of the loveliest and loneliest places in the world. And there in a cart-shed was a waggon of Pike of Tinhead. The farmer was a yeoman, and because he was a yeoman he had in his yard a wheatstack on staddles joined by heavy timbers—there were as many as six staddles on one side of the stack. At least I can imagine nobody else but a yeoman staddling his rick, and though I saw thousands of other ricks, this was the only one that was staddled.

¹ Pargeting is designing patterns and pictures on wet plaster.

Memory again ; this yeoman did so because his forefathers had always so done. And why? Because they had discovered by experience that it was the proper way to aerate the rick and keep the rats and mice away from it. I wonder how many tons of wheat and thousands of pounds are annually lost by building ricks on the ground, in other words by loss of memory.

This farmer had had this waggon for sixty years and still found it handy in the hay-field. His father had been a friend of Jacob Pike and both were buried in the churchyard of the great church at Edington where Alfred beat the Danes. I examined the waggon. The raves over the great hind-wheels had been lost and replaced by straight timbers, while the intricate under-carriage had been patched up by odd bits of unseasoned wood that brutally contrasted with the wonderful chamfering, hatching and carving of the original timbers. The former lettering and red and blue colouring had almost faded out. But the double shafts for the "thill" horse, the "vellies," the great hubs, the middle-staffs, the marvellous network of carved and perfectly fitting timbers of the under-carriage, there was enough of all this left to reveal what a work of art this waggon had once been. It was the most extraordinary mixture of beauty and shoddy, of solidity and flimsiness, of devotion and makeshift I think I have ever seen. The continuity had been broken and this yeoman had had the pain of propping up the old waggon like this because he could not afford to do anything else. His masters, the financiers and the politicians, had seen to that. When Jacob Pike had built that waggon, the country memory was still intact; when those spars and planks had been nailed on, the tradition was gone, and there stood the old waggon, suffering from loss of memory. And that waggon was our whole countryside.

III

Yet, if given the faintest breeze of encouragement, how quickly the sails of country memory fill again and the old creative energy stirs! I will give an example of the former from the paper of a friend of mine, the local historian, Dr. W. G. Hoskins, called *The Fields of Wigston Manor*. Herein he interprets nearly 150 field-names from this one parish, founded 1400 years

ago. Perhaps the most interesting thing about these and so all field-names is the sharp break in their continuity after the Enclosures. The Wigston field-names can be dated, the earliest records of them, from the mid-thirteenth century to the time of the Enclosure Award, and all of the ancient names vanish after the enclosure of this parish in 1766. Dr. Hoskins gave a lecture on these names to the village. But, as he wrote to me:

“the knowledge that the old fields, lanes, paths, copses and so forth had once all had their own individual names had passed utterly out of the village mind and the subject was as remote to them as though I had proposed to talk about Chinese pottery.”

Yet, when the lecture was given,

“the older men gradually unearthed from their minds the faintest recollections of some of these old names, or rather the folk-memory of them as spoken 50 years ago.”

His experience, he added,

“is that in all villages there is a vast unformed interest in the past history of the place and a desire to know more about it, but people don't know how to bridge the chasm between them and the last remnants of the civilisation that was destroyed in the late eighteenth century.”

The field-name, just like waggon-building, was a particular and local sign of certain permanent values, now suppressed or overlain.

Occasionally, however, other signs of them in country workmanship survive intact. Turning over the pages of a farming journal, I came upon the photograph of a thatched rick built by A. G. Wellings on a farm at Wykeham, near Scarborough. The rick looked nearly thirty feet high, and the springing of the coigns was so perfectly combined with the thatched roof-lines that there was no interruption of them at the eaves. The stack rose in a sweeping arc until a foot or so from the roof-ridge. It then dipped inwards, making a perfect ogee curve and finally tapered

off into a high finial. The actual roof-ridge itself dipped from the apices of the gable-ends, so that in the whole structure there was no rigid straight line and the eye passed on from curve to curve. At the gable-end, its architecture bore an exact resemblance to the canopy over an Easter Sepulchre or a figure in a niche, the only difference being that the Gothic finial was usually cusped and crocketed. Here was a fourteenth century Decorated chapel not of Ease but Labour, not in stone but straw. We marvel at such a rick nowadays; in the past, it must have been familiar in many regions. Was it originally a deliberate imitation of Gothic masonry, or did stone and straw take such forms independently? We know at least that such a masterpiece in straw could not have been built to-day except as a survival from a time when religion, art and architecture were a related trinity, and the work of the fields was done as much for its own sake as for its money-returns.

This intactness, when it is humanised by contact with a living man, raises Cobbett from the dead. One day I found myself at Islip and took a walk round the village. It is an outpost of the Oxfordshire Cotswolds, built of the oolite limestone, and descends from a ridge to the banks of a river, the confluence of the Ray and the Cherwell. The high street winds down to it in a succession of curves, repeating as at Castle Combe in the South Cotswolds the rounded twists and turns of the stream. Did the builders plan this curvilinear design in deliberate imitation of the river where the high street ends its journey down the slope? Of course not. How then did they achieve this singular harmony with their surroundings, this crowning of the beauty of the natural scene with another and kindred beauty of their own? One can only say that they were unconsciously so attuned to the natural design of the country where they lived and worked that they never went wrong in adding to and completing it.

As at Castle Combe, the church is a little retired off the high street about half-way down on a kind of spur or platform of its own. A sort of bay, a resting place on the way down, a withdrawing place from the busy flow of the street but not too retired from it, so that the church shares in the life of the winding and flowing street and yet stands apart from it. When you come to think of it, this mere manner of siting has an exquisite and symbolic rightness. The curling street, the curling stream at its

base and the tall straight tower of the church dominating the river and buttressing the street proclaim a unity between natural, human and superhuman which expresses a world, a universe, within the confines of a village.

In the churchyard was a thatcher with his heap of straw, his ladder, his bundle of rods and all the appurtenances of his trade, thatching the long low roof of a house forming part of the churchyard wall. He was splitting his withy rods to make his spicks to peg down the thatch. He was an old man (they nearly always are nowadays) and it was unusual to see him making spicks on the spot. The old story, of course: he could get no assistant. I told him of another case to the east where a thatcher on an estate who earned over £500 last year was, like him, unable to get an assistant, though the estate was prepared to guarantee him a permanent living. As we talked two small boys of the village drifted in to stare. I asked them whether they would like to be thatchers when they grew up. As I did so, I looked round at this master-man of Islip with his expressive but tranquil face, his easy movements, his confident work, the sweep of the neat thatch, the solid stone buildings, the masterful church tower, the road swinging down to the river. The boys shook their heads: what they wanted was to drive a tractor.

What will happen when the old men are too old to hold the rural structure together? The Village Produce Association, that most hopeful organization for reanimating village self-sufficiency, held a very successful demonstration at Islip in the summer of 1945. But our economic system does not favour local self-support. What will happen in the end to the village? Will the sanitary inspector "condemn" the houses and the planners straighten the crooked road and build two rows of Portal boxes on either side of it? Possibly, but nothing this age may do can alter the truth that this scene, the road like a river meeting the river like the road, the church a little aside and looking on, the comfortable groups of grey stone houses and the thatcher using the cornfields to roof them, is a little universe of as near a perfect harmony as man can attain on earth.

CHAPTER IV

WORKMEN OF THE WATERWAYS

“All your better deeds
Shall be in water writ, but this in marble.”
BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

TURNING from the country to its inland waters brings another example of a survival still intact. It is Newton Mill on Sling Common near Belbroughton in the Clent Valley, where the only cluster of Scythe Mills is left. I learned first of its existence from the colonel of our Home Guard when I was showing him my collection of country by-gones. They kindled his memory to describe to me the workshop. It was a combination of forge and water-mill, and the hammer was operated by a roof-high water-wheel whose four wooden pegs projecting from the axle tipped the great beam on its trestle so that the hammer at the other end thudded down every two seconds upon the anvil. The hammer-shaft was an oak beam ten feet long and a foot square, and weighted over the hammer with a heavy stone. The old scythe-maker sat in a pendulous chair attached by a hook to the blackened ceiling of the forge. Just before the tilt-hammer struck, he came forward on his toes with the shining and glowing scythe-blade in his hands to shape it under the blow. The sonorous ring of the hammer could be heard from two miles away, and to the colonel it was one of the most vivid and cherished memories of his childhood.

At first sight, this appears a very primitive contrivance. Actually, of course, it was a machine differing only in one respect from the most elaborate of modern machines. It did not deprive the worker of his personal skill and responsibility. On the contrary, this scythe-maker once made scythes not only for Worcestershire and England, but for the whole of Europe, fashioning each finely-tempered blade according to a very great variety of regional preferences in shape, length and curve. A more perfect example could not be of continuity between primitive

and modern in which a handicraft was relieved of excessive toil and drudgery without sacrificing the skill and control of the worker nor delegating his independent shaping power to a machine.

Two years after the colonel's visit, I discovered that one of the Belbroughton Scythe Mills still lives. Modern science denies miracles, but that a *small* craftsman should survive in a stone-grinding mill and make anything so antiquated as a scythe-blade is in an age of combines, mass production and unskilled labour a miracle indeed. The stones are three, each on an independent countershaft belt driven from great pulley wheels and geared up twice in turn from the mill-wheel by cogwheels that a friend tells me are twelve feet in diameter. Each grindstone has a half tree-trunk set before it on which the grinder sits astride with each foot resting on a small platform. Underneath this seat a pipe takes water to the stone from the mill-race. Not only does this fabulous hero grind the scythe-blades (two of the stones are for roughing and one is for finishing) but he actually gets the blades from the next mill down the stream where they are forged, exactly as I have described above.

This mill is also operated by a single man and the many different types of blade demand the utmost nicety of a mutual interchange in skill between the two mills. They vary not only in length and curvature but are ground in different ways. There are at least four of these types. The shortest for cutting scrub is known as the "Briar," the next, a straightish blade of 2 feet, 6 inches is called "Scotch," the third about three feet "Irish" and the last, longer than three feet, "London Grass." Now why is this called "London Grass"? I can only conjecture that it is the traditional name for the scythe once used by the haymakers who made an annual pilgrimage to the Middlesex meadows, as described in Walter Rose's *Good Neighbours*. It is better than a excavator's supreme "find" to learn that an industry like this, attached so intimately both in nomenclature and craftsmanship to those obsolete days when use and beauty were one and men worked for the love of good workmanship, should survive in an era when anything made by skill of hand is regarded as a museum piece.

One of the most remarkable things about the old country water-mills, whether their local power was used for grinding corn or scythes or for any other purpose, was the insignificance of the

streams whence numbers of them derived that power. The mighty works of the Clent Valley were made possible by the motive force of a mere brook. The corn-mills that not only supplied their neighbourhoods with the staff of life but were the navel of the whole rural and regional structure, were as often as not sited on the banks of tributary waters that might have been crossed on a plank bridge. Men in those days made the most of the least until the enormous development of resources consequent upon the invention of cheap mechanical power enabled them to make the least of the most.

The Ock is one of these satellite streams. In the autumn of 1943, Geoffrey Willoughby, the last owner of the last of its water-mills, told me much about the history of his mill and the former fullness of its activities on the banks of the rivulet that winds past Wantage to join the Thames at Abingdon. Six months later I heard that he had been killed.

This Letcombe brook (it is scarcely more) passes the mill below the Iron Age citadel of Letcombe Regis on the Great Ridgeway that crests the Berkshire Downs from Streatley to Hackpen Hill and Avebury. Though but a trickle, it was spanned by no fewer than eleven mills fifty years ago, and Willoughby's family had ground corn in his mill since 1596. When I last talked to him, he was, of course, grinding only cattle-grist. But in his grandfather's time, the mills of the Ock were supplying Wantage and the numerous hamlets and villages of the neighbourhood with all the flour they needed for the housewives to bake their own bread. Wantage was then called Golden Wantage, possibly because it was the axis of a rich corn-growing region that fed the mills that ground the flour that supplied the town and villages with the most nourishing of all foods, whole-grain bread.

When the mills fell derelict owing to the trade-war of the roller-mills at the big ports, the delicate co-operation between the stream, the mills, the corn, the neighbourhood and the inhabitants thereof was dislocated. The vitality of the whole region was struck by a paralysis from which the revival of corn-growing during the great wars of the twentieth century was a respite, not a recovery. And now the last of the millers of the Ock has gone. In a few years the story that he told me of the local self-maintenance, the thriftiness and abundance that had crowned the labours of countrymen by the waters of that downland runnel

will not be even a memory. Once upon a time it had been a source of life and bounty to a whole region. A waggon in the shed next door to the mill and dated 1824 is, with the now masterless mill itself, a sole survivor of the days when rural England was still standing on her own feet.

I pass on to a letter sent to me and written by another miller forced out of business by the milling combine. His family had been village millers for four generations until in his own words "more mechanisation, combines and amalgamations had ruthlessly crushed the small man out of existence." This dispossessed man's father was an accomplished craftsman at dressing his mill-stones with the "thrift":

"My father loved his mill and the making of flour and it was a sad day for him when we decided in face of severe competition and the public demand for a white loaf to shut down . . . the business. The sound of the water rushing over the weir . . . formed the background of my childhood days."

So attuned were men like this to the rhythm and pulsation of the mill-wheel that his father, while sitting in the mill-house, could tell by a slight variation in their tone and pace that a readjustment to the stones was necessary:

"The bread made from this stone flour was delicious and I have never tasted better, though by commercial standards it was dark, and so we could not hold the trade."

The last of these stone mills in this particular county, so this miller writes, had its licence taken away by the Ministry of Food. Our bureaucracy kindly takes on the business of the capitalist combines in eliminating all competition, often giving the directors State jobs into the bargain.

This miller then gave me a list of the local industries once at work in his village. There were two corn mills, two fellmonger's yards producing leather and making leggings, gloves, etc., two carpenter's shops, one wheel-wright's shop, one forge making agricultural implements, one malt-mill, one builder's yard, one butcher's shop, one pork butcher's shop and one bakery. All have been knocked out of business except one of the water-mills pro-

ducing animal foods only, the builder's yard and the bakery. This has all happened in his lifetime. He concludes "A master-man in those days meant that he was master of his craft, not just an employer of labour." Such has been the history not only of this village but of all our villages over the whole country.

Here is an extract from the letter of a mill-stone dresser himself:

"It has taken a war to reveal to every country loving individual the vital part the local water-mill is still capable of achieving. Every factory nowadays displays a notice exhorting operatives to save power, yet sad to mention when we take a walk into the country many a ghost is encountered in the shape of a ruined mill with water power running to waste. By way of introducing myself, I am a mill-stone dresser, having put in a lifetime in mills up and down the country and having tended and dressed all kinds of stone including the almost forgotten French Burr Wheat stone on which our ancestors made good wholesome flour which supplied the stamina needed by this island race." After dismissing roller-mill flour as "a fraud," he continues: "My father, who owned a country mill, often remarked of English wheat that there was none to compare with it—look, for instance, at the time it takes to mature. I can just remember seeing him making flour of wheat gleaned from the harvest field by the labourers' wives and he being content to take the bran as payment, the farmers having to pay per sack. Another thing while on this subject—any one who can remember the process may also call to mind the smell and taste awakened, the very atmosphere was laden with the savoury appetising flavour . . . but you never feel tempted at the packing end of a modern flour mill . . . I am still employed in the milling trade but regret to say not on millstone work which called for skill ranking almost on a level with some of the characters you picture."

Something of the extraordinary versatility of the country craftsman was revealed in the 18-page letter of this mill-stone dresser. He gave me an elaborate description of the geological differences between the granite French "Burr-Stone" and the limestone "Peak" from Derbyshire, mainly used for grinding

grist for cattle, and of the correspondingly different techniques for dressing them. He enlarged upon what the blacksmith had to do in "drawing out" and tempering the steel blade of the "thrift" or dressing tool, as though he were one himself. He gave a detailed account of how he used to lift the "runner" and "bed-stone" from their positions in order to dress the "furrows," and I felt that I might have been reading a description of how the trilithons of Stonehenge were moved. He wrote like an expert about the timber-work of the mill and of the water pigments used in order to expose the grinding face of the stones. He had a great respect for the age of many of the stones he had worked, "well in their prime in Lord Nelson's time" and, having been a dresser in Dorset, gave the Thomas Hardy as well as the map names for the places he had worked in and loved. He made it clear that to be a good dresser it was necessary to understand the structure, the carpentering and the engineering of the water-mill as a whole. His father, who had been "delighted to think" that his son had "adopted his love of the occupation," had not only been the owner of a mill, but a cabinet-maker who "throughout his life of over ninety years had retained a love of woodwork" and had himself put in a new overshot water-wheel and geared it to steam power. Our former craftsmen, in fact, knew without the aid of books or research everything there was to be known about their own particular countrysides.

From the country miller to the country baker. Mr. Middleton of Padbury, near Buckingham, with whom I took tea in the autumn of 1944, is a traditional craftsman, and Padbury is a village mentioned in Domesday Book. It still retains many substantial cottages of discreet half-timbering, brick and colour-wash with thatched roofs of chevroned ridge-boards in the style of Norfolk reed-thatching, strung at wide intervals along a minor road. This, together with the good stewardship of All Souls College, has saved Padbury from being swamped by the mean jerry-built stuff that has been the fate of so many villages. In his village Mr. Middleton takes so proper a pride that he is by way of becoming its local historian, tracing its fortunes and changes from the earliest times. He showed me an Enclosure Award Map more than six feet high, the Account Book of Hillesden Manor in 1658 with an entry recording a 30s.

tithe payment to one Samuel Pepys, a kinsman presumably of the diarist, and the copybook of his grandfather who was also a baker.

But these antiquarian pursuits were more than recreation ; they were significant for his work. In the baking-room was a large brick-oven, the bricks of whose sides were white with heat and age (they were eighty years old) and floor-tiles had been and still are locally made by hand at Chalfont St. Peter in the same county. To hold the heat, they are made of an extremely soft clay which can only be manipulated by hand. At the side of this handsome oven was a small furnace fed by beech faggots and coal whose damper by means of the draught throws out a tongue of flame over the oven's tiled floor. The only technical difference from the modern steam heater is that it has to be refuelled with each batch of loaves or cakes, though less and less so after the first and second. There was also a small electric dough-mixer worked off a belt.

These details are not trivial. On the contrary, the whole bake-room was a modern version of the cottage brick-oven, improving the best of the past without violently breaking the continuity between past and present. Before a batch was put in, the oven was swept with a scuffle instead of old style with a mop. What was still more important, this development, in contradistinction from progress, still left ample latitude for craftsmanship in baking. The bakehouse was a vivid illustration of what is maintained throughout the book, that craftsmanship is the only force in the world to control and utilise the machine instead of the machine controlling the worker and robbing him of his skill and pleasure in his work.

Consequently, I found conversation with Mr. Middleton very interesting. He is not only a craftsman but, what is much rarer even than this, a young one. I sought his views on whole-grain bread (and he had a penetrating knowledge of breads and bread-making that older men might envy). These views were exactly what I expected from such a man. He had no illusions about the "white loaf." But, though he cured himself of an illness with authentic bread, he had to bake germless flour for lack of all but six customers for the real. We both asked each other—why do people prefer "white bread." which is not bread at all but a façade? Why sacrifice the stomach to the eye, especially, he said, as they like black cakes ?

He told me how his father, also a baker, had had to bake the new flour, first ground on porcelain rollers on the Hungarian model about 1870, because "white bread" had been adopted on the next round but his. But how? First the squire took to it, then the parson, then the whole village. But why? For this was in the days before the tin-opener. Perhaps it was that when taste in beauty went in the last century, taste in food followed. At any rate, this young craftsman's taste in both was uncorrupted. He knew food-values as well as all the rights of way in his parish and all the details of the poor remnants of the country crafts that still exist in his village. He was a craftsman and the craftsman can always be trusted to know the difference between the true and the false. And because he was a craftsman, respect for the past went hand in hand with enlightenment in the present and for the future.

Cobbett always insisted upon a balanced intercourse between town and country in a mutuality of needs. The canals, before the railways partially paralysed them and the industrial towns had outgrown and paralysed their rural neighbourhoods, acted as the intermediaries in this exchange of local needs. The traffickers on them brought country produce as well as took coal and urban manufactures. Hence the bargemen reveal vestiges of the same interplay between art and business which was the mark of all rural craftsmanship. One of the purest and most unalloyed pleasures of my life is to receive from time to time additions to my collection of "bygones" of husbandry and rural industries. They come to me from all quarters; they are always unexpected and I rarely know the senders. The pleasure of the object itself has been enhanced by the manner of its coming.

One such was brought me in the spring of 1944. It is a richly ornamented stool made and painted by a boat-builder of our canals, Herbert Tooley of Banbury. The stool has no legs and the two sides that support it are themselves wide curved panels of wood offering nearly as broad a surface for the paint-brush as the top surface, while the strips of wood along the two open sides are likewise painted. The design itself is an arrangement of roses

and their leaves, painted in yellow, light green, a dark lustrous red, maroon, a mauvy pink, blue and cream-white on a dark green background, and the surface, the panelled sides and the strips at right angles to them are each painted with a different pattern. The gaiety, the liveliness, the richness and sureness of these paintings on a stool not more than about 18 inches high light up the whole room, while the paints used are of the freshest and clearest—no muddiness anywhere. You get something of the same felicity of sheer colour in Bruegel's rich paintings of the homeliest country scenes (*La Moisson*, for instance) and in eighteenth century *Chinoiserie*. There is a charming border of flowing lines round the top-surface of this glowing little stool which is not unlike Chinese calligraphy. The curved lines are in harmony with the rounded shapes of the roses as is the dancing border with the vivacity of the colouring.

The boatman who made and painted this joyous thing is not known to the art-schools; he does not call himself an artist but a boat-builder. I should imagine it extremely doubtful whether he had so much as heard of the word Art. How then did he come to paint these exquisite pictures on my stool, and what is more, in a series of formal designs? The answer is that he did so because he was a canal boat-builder, which will not be an answer at all intelligible to the art-critic. But it is perfectly intelligible to any countryman with a memory. This unknown painter of the canal boat-trade, one of the very last of his kind, paints like a master because it has been the tradition of his particular trade to do so. Before, that is to say, the canals were sabotaged by the railways, before the individual owners of the boats were bought out by the companies, it is no exaggeration to say that every small-owner along the waterways was a painter every bit as good as he who has conferred so brilliant a gift upon me.

We know that this is true because the rose-design and the castle-design are traditional. As well as roses, these small owners used to paint the doors of their barges with romantic castles and of the gayest colouring. The castle and the rose were conventions belonging to these boatmen alone and for a man not to paint castles and roses on his floating home was to be less than a man.

Some months after receiving this stool, I spent the night on one of these boats, moored in the Gloucester-Birmingham Canal. The view was across rolling country to a long-drawn richly

moulded horizon of the Abberley Hills to the west and along the indented line of the Clees as far as the shaggy brow of the Wyre Forest to the north. In the middle distance, the needle spire of Bromsgrove Church magnetised the broken country and gave it an orderliness not its own; the foreground was various with orcharded slopes. How beautifully the vessel itself, Viking-like with its high bows and long lines, responded to the plenitude and diversity of the landscape! For everywhere, on the walls, on the cabin's door, on the dipper and water-can standing on the fo'castle and elsewhere, the boat was adorned with this folk-art. The big water-can was crowded with the rose-design over every inch of it, even on the hinge of the curved handle. The castle-motive was painted both as a mural in the cabin and on the back of a tray. It was the oddest thing to see a French or Dutch château, complete with flanking towers and pepper-pot turrets, rising gigantic and rococo above furry trees girdling a lake and a cottage with a blue roof, embosomed in them. What did the old canal-men know about the French château? Did perhaps the Dutch boatmen hand it on to our men? This at any rate was the form their fancy took, faithfully from generation to generation. Nothing could seem more prosaic than horse-pulling a barge-like boat from town to town carrying coals or flour. But the romance of the long winding reaches, the gliding countryside, the open air, the free life and, above all, the romance of ownership, was theirs and they expressed the goodness of these things by their folk-art, by their castles and their roses.

These barges are, in fact, related to Cleopatra's barge on the Cydnus, and both descended no doubt from the painted Nile-ships of Queen Hatshepsut and her forerunners. Mr. Frederick Burgess gives a few rare examples of the *oculus*, still painted on Sicilian boats and conventionalised here by a star or diamond. He also suggests that the elaborate designs of landscape and foliation owe much to Staffordshire pottery. Again, my friend, L. T. C. Rolt, who has an intimate knowledge of canal life, boats and boatmen, tells me that the interior layout of the boat-cabin is identical with that of the Reading type of gipsy waggon. He conjectures that the influence of the land-nomad upon the water-nomad was derived from gipsy casual labour on canal construction when the first (Bridgwater) canal was cut across the Mosses near Manchester, at that time open heathland much frequented by gipsies. He

supports this contention by the fact that boat-decoration is confined to the canals. The navigable river-boatman has no such connection with the diddecoys and never paints his boats. But, whatever be the origins of painting boats on the canals, this folk-art itself is as old as seafaring man.

It was once common to all mankind in every land and every clime, varying only according to the strength and self-expression of national characteristics, and particularly healthy and vigorous and widely diffused in our own people. The destruction of this universal art-sense in mankind has only been made possible because a man's joy in his ordinary work has become a thing of the past.

The lock-keeper near the barge where I spent the night told my friend who owns it that in the old days lock-gates were changed in one day: they now take a week. The men worked from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m., though often having to walk miles to the lock. On a summer morning they would arrive at 3 or 4 a.m. "But then," he said, "every one took an interest; now all they think of is how much is in the pocket at the end of the week." It was out of that joy in work that ordinary men made objects like this richly decorated stool of mine which communicates its joyousness to me and lights up the whole room.

CHAPTER V

WORKMEN OF THE SMALL TOWN

"All these trust to their hands: and every one is wise in his work. Without these cannot a city be inhabited: and they shall not dwell where they will, and go up and down: but they will maintain the state of the world, and all their desire is in the work of their craft."

Ecclesiasticus.

BETWEEN the Wrekin and the long double ridge of Wenlock Edge lies a patch of primeval England whose history is more curious and significant than are any of the tidal tales of Border warfare a score of miles away. Here from Coalport on the east to the Cistercian Abbey of Buildwas west of it, the Severn has ploughed a narrow furrow through the coal measures and runs swift, straight and shallow through a gorge of lofty cliff, clothed on the north bank with forest. The two mountains, the one a range of palaeozoic limestone whose north-eastern end abuts on the river, the other a sandstone hog's back which is the central boss of the whole county, are the enormous gateposts of the region. The great river slides by the forested precipice of its southern bank, while the bristly spine of the Wenlock limestone has dark woods that climb even higher. The solitary grandeur of the Wrekin Mount looks across to the maze of dingles slipping deviously down to the Gorge. This almost savage majesty, together with the confused and convulsive geology of the region, so dramatises the scene that Bishop Percy's reputed discovery of the *Reliques of English Poetry* at Shifnal on the plateau above the Gorge seems more than accident. The wild Severn Gorge seems to cradle their passionate rhymes.

Something happened at this one spot that changed the face of the world. The Industrial Revolution began in the Severn Gorge. If it began elsewhere at much the same early period, all traces of that gigantic and demoralising accession of power have been effaced by later developments. But not here. The revolution began here, but here it stopped dead. Ironbridge is to-day still

more or less as it was in the early nineteenth century. It was one of the first settlements of a Revolution which was to obliterate local variety and individuality over the whole world.

The wooded cliff of the north bank is what it was when Darby's great iron bridge was building in 1779; as it was when the Iron Age Goidels named the Severn. Had that steep and conical woodland been felled, the cliff would have slipped and slid into the river. The south bank, with its irregular terraces and brick and sandstone houses strewn as though dropped out of a sack along the narrow Wharfage and over the face of the Gibraltar-like rock, presents a surprising spectacle. Progress stopped progressing immediately after its first tremendous bound; progress became obsolete and derelict. There is a blast-furnace not far away and a steel works at Madeley. But neither really dominates the scene, and it is probable that the brick of many of the houses came from the Madeley clay-pits. They can be called neither beautiful nor ugly; they are transitional between the one and the other, between the new diffused uniformity and the old local-traditional variations. The transition occurred on this very spot but it froze. So we see it to-day, as we can see a drop of water in a cave falling a million years ago.

Here are derelict kilns with bushes sprouting through their brick-courses. Slag-tips pimple the uplands but are moulded by nature's green fingers into the landscape. Relics of a few beam-engines here and there remind us of how steam-power which is local and durable was pushed out by the internal combustion engine. Boulton and Watt's beam-engine came from the works of Wilkinson the iron-master and Ironbridge became so because smelting by coke out of the shallow carboniferous deposits of the Gorge replaced smelting by wood, probably from the oak of the Wyre Forest ramparting Bewdley to the south. Iron had so entered the soul of Wilkinson that he was even, I gather, buried in an iron coffin. But it was the local ironstone that made Ironbridge, not the imported pig-iron that now makes steel. Wilkinson and Darby of the Iron Bridge were still local craftsmen who jumped from wood to coke, but not out of the land where they were born and worked. Coal and ironstone had been used in Coalbrookdale since the twelfth century, and the art of casting iron by smelting the ore in coke furnaces and pouring into moulds remained an art and so became a wedge within the Industrial Revolution. This

is the whole point of what we see and we see it supremely in the Iron Bridge that spans the river to this day.

In fact, it can be seen twice over. In one of the houses of Ironbridge there is a magnificent series of coloured prints showing the Iron Bridge as it was when first built in 1779. In one of these pack-horses stand by the Bridge while the river-barges are being loaded and men cross planks between wheelbarrows with a pole at each end. With what dignity the hundred-foot span of the great Bridge with its soaring and dipping arch, the flanking arches and the abutments of stone sheeted with iron catches to itself and focuses the grandeur of the river-gorge itself! At twilight sometimes the stream moves under the iron bridge in plates of beaten gold embossed with silver and overarched by this black rainbow. The work of man is not belittled by the superb gesture of nature whose river had carved out these cliffs; it spans them and by the interplay between man and nature is a symbolic expression of man's place in nature. He manipulates and manages nature but all is still harmony between them. The break is not yet: man armed by the Revolution has yet to confront nature in the ambition of conquest.

If the beauty of the Bridge has been the chance of the artist in the prints, its utility and craftsmanship appear when you walk down the footpath of the bank to where the arches take off from their buttress. It is not conceivable that cast-iron work on this Titanic scale could be executed to-day. The smiths of Vulcan might have bridged the Styx with it, so solidly has it spanned the years from the dead beginnings of the Revolution to the living present. As you follow the line of the arch, the meaning of the whole Gorge can be deciphered as clearly as the inscription cast upon the iron at the apex. It is that English craftsmanship survived the Revolution in its initial stages and even gained strength from it. Its roots held firm; the continuity was not severed; the pious faculty of mastership had not yet surrendered to the acquisitive passion that put man in bondage to his own discovery of cheap power. The goodness of the work itself was still dominant.

The glory of that continuity makes the heart leap as the arch leaps across the river. In the majestic ruins of the Cluniac Abbey at Much Wenlock tucked under the Edge's northern tip is an early twelfth century Lavabo carved with figures and Gospel

scenes. They might have been chiselled as you watched, so fresh and new they look. The stone was Wenlock limestone, the primary Silurian limestone than which none is harder. Cotswold oolitic limestone is as a lightly-pressed to a hard-pressed cheese compared with it. The later masons preferred the softer Triassic limestones abundant in Shropshire which have now peeled and scaled like the bark of a plane-tree. The Lavabo and the Bridge are fellows in the brilliance of man's handling of the most dour and intractable of natural materials.

The Bridge is the last powerful token of an English craftsmanship that had lasted up to it without a break from prehistoric times. A few miles away, there is as great a marvel as the Iron Bridge itself—namely the survival of that same manual power over iron as created the Bridge. North-east of the Severn Gorge towards the Staffordshire border stands on the plateau the little market-town of Shifnal, not far from the Boscabel manor and oak that saved Charles after Worcester. Here work the chain-makers of the old-established firm of Edge and Sons. It is a fact that, if a monk of the Cistercian Abbey of Buildwas at the foot of the Gorge had walked in among these chain-makers at the head of the Gorge, there would have been hardly a sign to tell his glance at the sweating and hammering smiths and strikers that he had arrived seven centuries too late. But if he turned up in ten years to come, he would find nothing to remind him of home. A new electrical plant for flash-welding has been recently evolved which bids fair to make the chain-makers of Shifnal as obsolete as the Cistercian monk. I myself have seen them only just in time. But I took away with me an imperishable memory of the power of craftsmanship to stand up to the huge developments of the Revolution which has destroyed it.

The Coalport china whose workshops Turner set up from Worcester in 1772 have gone now, and I could only buy it in an antique shop at Shrewsbury. The figured clay-pipes of Broseley are soon to follow, and I obtained almost the last of them made. The wool of Shrewsbury and the rugs of Church Stretton, the pillow-lace and woollens of Bridgnorth and the hair-weaving of Market Drayton, the bells and wood-carving of Chelmarsh and the smithying of Ludlow, all these and the honourable self-help of England with them, are a tale of the past.

Not quite yet the chain-making of Shifnal. The workshops

are not at all like the romantic pictures of ye olde English smithy. They are just open sheds with corrugated iron roofs. There are two of these, one for the heavier chains to anchor battleships and liners, the other for lighter chains of many sizes that lie coiled up tortuous on the floor like a hibernaculum of reticulated snakes. Along the whole length of the heavy-chain shed is ranged a series of hearths, each with its hooded furnace, water-canister, sandbox, anvil, tongs, swage, sledge and other hammers. Two or three men and sometimes boys are welding and striking at each hearth. The smith hauls the next link of the clanking chain out of the blaze, or, as the old term is, blizzy, and the strikers, wielding their sledges, go at the fiery metal with a rhythmic fury, a swing from the torso and a play of muscles glorious to behold:

“The vapour of the fire wasteth his flesh, and he fighteth with the heat of the furnace: the noise of the hammer and the anvil is ever in his ears, and his eyes look still upon the pattern of the thing that he maketh; he setteth his mind to finish his work and watcheth to polish it perfectly.”

I was so spell-bound by the roar of the flames, the flying sparks, the surge of brawny shoulders, the belling of the anvil, the perfect timing and the astounding speed and urgency of the whole operation that I failed to time it. But these specialised blacksmiths could not have taken longer than two minutes to forge each separate link. This includes shaping with the swage and attaching to the chain and all, the links of an inch and a quarter or under being joined by bending in the ends, the thicker ones by hammering the sides.

The force of the fire and the weight of precisely adjusted and directed strength turn the ponderable iron into a malleable dough, while the hammers work their will on the anvil like bobbins on a lace-pillow. What power is conferred by style! It is the style that forges another link in the chain, not the strength, its instrument. The style is the man, and this is man's work. Least resistance works this miracle of weaving an iron bar into a necklace, not the pounding of brute force. The poise, the correlation, the utter precision of every motion from swing to blow was a kind of scansion and each link completed was a metrical close. Airiness of flame was matched by fluidity of muscle. The co-ordinated

strategy of the lightning-brief process gave every pounce and punch of the whirling hammers a kind of delicacy. A man's job, this play of thew and sinew, but also an artist's.

What will they do with these men when their anchorage to their hearths is pulled up? The dole or the assembly line for them. Then they will cease to be men, for what makes a man is a home and a craft: lose them and he becomes the mobile unit of a gang. What is education for but to make men of boys and women of girls? There were several boy-strikers toiling and sweating at the shaping of iron. When their fathers hear no more the music of metal it will be the State school only for them. The author of *Cleanliness and Godliness* wrote to me one day and told me the story of the Burusha people's reply when they were told that children in England were made to go to school between the ages of five and fourteen. They said: "But that is the time when they ought to be *learning* things."

There was an old man in this communal workshop (but we must be careful with the word "communal"; what it meant here and ought to mean always and everywhere is a number of independent workshops all working together), and he told me he had been a chain-maker for thirty-two years. Thirty-two years of bending iron! In winter sometimes his chest is on the equator and his back in the polar regions. Always rivers of sweat course down his front. But he spoke as though he were pleased about it. At labour so gigantic and furious these men of iron work only from 6.30 to 11.30 with a break of 15 minutes and consuming in these five hours twelve pints of beer supplied up to the war by the firm.

The chain-makers of Shifnal probably came originally from Ironbridge, though the firm from Walport. Like their fellows of Cradley Heath, they began as home-workers at their own forges. But the rapid rise of industrialism at the expense of agriculture forced them from home, first as part- and then full-time workers. Yet they escaped the fate of the Nailers in being first sweated and then ruined because their high degree of skill exempted them from the competition of the machine. Each smith contracts with the firm to make chains at so much a foot and also with his own strikers. So, though these smiths are now working for a single firm under the wage-system, they retain distinct traces of the traditional economy of the master-apprentice self-contained in-

dependent workshop. They have brought their pre-industrial past into a present when industrialism is showing marked signs of decay. They represent a stage, long superseded elsewhere, when craftsmanship for a fleeting period partnered industrialism. Brief indeed for the core of industrialism is the factory, and the labour of a factory made efficient and up-to-date is a property-less and skill-less proletariat, of men, that is to say, made as like as may be to the machines they serve.

It is singular to think that Ironbridge must to-day be very much like it was when Cobbett was making his northern tour among the new manufacturing towns. Ironbridge is a period piece but there is one native of it who is not. He belongs to an altogether different and pre-industrial culture, the culture of the River Severn. There cannot be in the whole world a man more attached to his native river than Harry Rogers, perfectly summed up in his own designation of himself as "the coracle mon." He is as intimately and passionately a son of Sabrina as the figures that cluster about rivers in the engravings of Drayton's *Polyolbion*. But not the less of a real man for that. When a man becomes symbolic it is because of his very reality as a man.

The rich and powerful individuality of Harry Rogers has been nurtured by his belonging to a river second only in the annals and physiography of England to Thames. The long straight reaches where the pebbles are washed clean by the strong-running stream are reflected in the vigour, the bright edge and forthrightness of his character; its loopings and meanderings are a picture of his whimsiness, his gift of winding and allusive narrative and his fierce hereditary independence to which confinement or regimentation would be worse than death. Its leaping salmon, its deep pools where the eels squirm in the darkness seem to express in their riverine terms the vivacity of his piercing blue-grey eye and his long long roots down in the depths of his Salop soil.

Therefore, Harry, or Orry as he calls himself, stands for a yet larger symbol than as Sabrina's wild son; he is the formidable figure of the independent English countryman before the En-

closures harried him off his land and the Industrial Revolution broke his culture and drove him into the towns. Harry Rogers of Ironbridge has nothing to do with the beginnings of that Revolution there; all he has to do with iron is in his iron constitution and because he stretches so far back into our history as to reach the Iron Age of the Celts who named the river Severn. You can partly, but only partly, place Harry historically by his paternal poaching blood. His father is now mythology in that branch of living: one effect of the Enclosures was to breed a hardy tribe of poachers whom that thieving law forced to become desperate men. The bolder spirits of the Commoners of England who escaped hanging or transportation turned wild and became night-birds. Harry, who emphatically stands for the "bold peasantry, their country's pride" which their country crushed, has a streak of lawlessness in him which was the consequence of the legal crime of enclosing the commons.

But when I think of Harry, I think of him as indivisible from the river. He is to Severn what Brusher Mills was to the New Forest, Ted Allen to the Essex saltings. In an eighteenth century directory, my friend, Mr. Rolt, discovered one Rogers, a barge-master trading between Worcester and Ironbridge. Whether or no this be an authentic ancestor, there is no doubt that his forefathers have worked for generations on Severn. The following extract from a book, *Broseley and its Surroundings* (1879) shows that, if Harry is unique now, once he was one of a company:

"They were a distinctive class of men . . . primitive in their habits, they studied the points of the wind, knew the direction most favourable for driving the rain against the great watershed of Wales, so as to swell the volume of water in the river, were familiar with the moon's changes, were great waiters on Providence and would stand for months looking into the stream, patiently waiting for a 'fresh' to carry them down—some were hard drinkers, heavy swearers, given to gasconade and good living."

His father, as a side-line from poaching, worked on the barges when they used to come up to Ironbridge, and took the last of them up to Shrewsbury. Harry's very workshop is as close to the river as human house can get, being a long weather-boarded hut

built on piles, like a Lake Village, on the lowest terrace of the south bank a few steps below the girders of the Iron Bridge. He keeps his coracle under it and the workshop itself, with its chains, ropes, nets, corks, flotsam, paddles, timber and coracle-laths, might be a beached barge. His profession, if Harry can be said to have a definite profession, is rabbiting and coracle-making. He is also a mole-catcher, making his own wooden mole-traps and salting the skins. This is another indication which pushes him back into the Iron Age. He has actually figured in a coracle race as an ancient Briton. I found nothing peculiar in the thought of this timeless picaresque "coracle mon of Siv'n" paying a call on the Goidelic or Brythonic coracle men who dared the tricky waters of his river in a craft you carry on your back and yet have your arms free.

For making coracles he uses axed ash-laths for the frame which is now covered with tarred calico for the ancient hide which perhaps conditioned its size and cupped shape.¹ The split shaft of the paddle is also ash, but the long rectangular blade has to be of seasoned oak. Harry gets his from the timbers of demolished old cottages but also from floating timber which his maternal Severn yields up to him. He lives by Severn in other ways than floating on it in a craft much frailer, lighter and more sensitive to current and ripple than an empty brandy-cask. The flowing surface of the broad stream brings him part of his living, for any floating junk is grist to Harry's mill, and he puts it to a variety of surprising usages. Thus, he lives for the river, from the river, by the river and on the river, a life as semi-aquatic as the bank-vole's, as buoyant on the water as the tufted duck's and up and down the river, though further than, the kingfisher's.

After a lengthy sitting with him, I was so fortunate as to witness a moment of one of his river-lives—that of on the river. Entirely on his own initiative, he fished out his coracle from under the floor of the workshop and gave an exhibition—Harry is the born showman—of what he could do with it on Severn's

¹ The oldest coracles, recorded by Herodotus, those of the Babylonians on the Euphrates, were "round as a shield." The framework was withy, covered by a hide. The shape of the modern coracle is more like a very broad cradle with one "end" flattened. On the rivers Towy, Teifi and Taf, there are still some 16 to 20 coracle-makers left, notably the Evanses of the Towy. At Bewdley coracles were made of woven oak laths, and an oak-scuttle I bought of John Birch, the Groom-squire of Bewdley, is a miniature of the Bewdley coracle.

bosom. When you consider that to scratch or look over the edge of the craft or stretch out a leg, almost to cough and certainly to sneeze, is enough to upset it, his performance may be regarded as one of the few marvels left in a now wonderless world. He got this thistledown affair into mid-stream (you work the paddle in front, if a craft nearly as round as half an orange can be said to have a front) and proceeded to whirl it round and round, as though it were a kind of water-top. Then he lunged to and fro, sporting with the flimsy thing as though he were riding one of Neptune's nags. After that, without the slightest warning, he tumbled off the plank-seat across the middle and with knees drawn up and head tucked in like a Neolithic burial pretended to go to sleep. Up and with a breath-catching gesture he flung the paddle twenty yards away into the current, stretched himself at full length across the plank and like an inverted turtle swam with his hands after the paddle which he easily recovered. But this circus-prowess was as nothing to what a friend saw him do one day. His coracle was towing a landing-stage and a tree-trunk behind it under Buildwas Bridge and all through the Gorge, with the river in semi-flood and flowing like a mill-race between the cliffs. How old Drayton's Naiads of Sabrina would have clapped their hands to see a sight like this!

When the floods reach the houses scattered among the terraces of the south bank, Harry goes out in his coracle and rescues the marooned—in his coracle, the prey of every wandering puff of air. In the old days before net-fishing was prohibited, he used to manœuvre his nets from the coracle. The corky little vessel for this Severn-sider is an extra limb like the wings on the feet of Mercury.

Once Harry was in danger of being removed by the law from Severn-side, and my friend was anxious for him to tell me the story of his great victory over modern authority. As it happened, he needed very little encouragement to recapitulate this star-drama of his life. The best of the old countrymen all had a highly developed sense of theatre, a heritage from the oral culture of the peasantry. I have often thought how grievous was the loss of this power of dramatisation by the transporting of the flower of that peasantry after the revolt against the Enclosures. Harry excelled in this power. Even before my friend had thrown out a feeler and not five minutes after I had met him, he took me out of the work-

shop and pointed to a clear space across the path on the other side. One brick cottage stood on it—his own. See it, he said, that's the Victory. I did not catch what he meant but what did strike me was the tension in his expression and the pose of his body as though big with some idea. And if Harry is a virtuoso in narrative, he has a presence and features which are "great allies" to making the very utmost of a good rousing story.

He was the ancient Briton at a regatta but what he actually looks like is the conventional representation of the Julius Cæsar who encountered him. With the tunic and the laurel wreath, he would be the spit of him. The long face, the square jaw, the eagle-nose, the deep-set eyes, broad forehead and salient cheek-bones are all there and set on a well-knit body, full of lithe and easy movement. And Harry acts with his face and body as most countrymen do. He extracts from his drama its last pennyweight of goodness, interest and pithiness. They were the more expressive from the noble waistcoat he wore. It was worked with red stars or florets and had white leather facings down the front and along the pockets. He had worn it for thirty-five years.

Only the dictaphone would have done for Harry's story and that would have been no good. For it is impossible to convey his *ipssisima verba*. Not because he liberally seasoned his soliloquy with the pepper of his naïve oaths nor because the Severn lingo, clipped and abrupt and with many elisions, would be hard to reproduce. I mean that the whole performance was pre-eminently oral, a drama of action no less than of words and staged by the whole man, body, hands, voice, eyes and swift variations of expression. To abstract from these his words only would be salt without its savour.

His voice alone made him a rare actor, always modulated to the occasion, rising and falling, now soft and slow, almost a drawl, and then shot out of his mouth as from a catapult. Hands and face abetted it to the full. And he could colour the tale with little imaginative touches, as for instance, "when only Adam was about," to indicate a long way back in time, his variation on the old countryman's "when Adam were a little bwoy" and Shakespeare's "When Noah was a sailor."

Yet what wild Harry had to tell was profoundly serious, a story that came within an ace of tragedy. For it was the story of how authority, under the shield, I suppose, of the Slum Clear-

ances Act, tried to prize him apart from Severn, to knock the limpet off the rock. His cottage was condemned with half a dozen others beside it and he was ordered to go and live in a Council house at Madeley, something like a mile away, where he could only keep one dog. One dog, when he needed four, not to mention the ferrets! Harry Rogers in a Council house, it was a near squeak, and if the "sanitary mon" had won, I do not think he would have endured it. It would have been worse for him even than for Wordsworth's "Poor Susan," mourning from the city:

"The one only dwelling on earth that she loves."

It would have broken his heart to leave the banks of Severn. But before that his desperation would have made him break the law in a more active fashion than clinging to a condemned cottage. He said as much himself and he said something else which I shall never forget, "I don't lave Siv'n except feet foremost." Seven words to express finally and for ever the English countryman's attachment to his own place.

But the sanitary mon did not win and the tale of how he and the "Court of Enquiry" and the "Magisters" and the summons-bearers and the police, the whole of Xerxes host, were beaten by Harry's resolve to stay by Severn or die was related with not an encounter, not a detail missed. It was not a monologue but, going one better than Bottom, he did play all the parts, by no means forgetting his own. This he invested with an heroic stature that was at times more than life-size. For though they pulled his house about his ears, Harry did stay by Severn.

What is more, he built his own house on the site of and out of the bricks of his lost cottage and of the cottages that stood by it and out of the timber his own hands had plucked from the river. And he built it in nine weeks. We looked a bit sceptical here, my friend and I. "Eustace," shouted Harry. "Ay." "Come here a moment. Did us build my house in nine weeks?" A face peered round the workshop door and once more said "Ay." He and his assistant, Eustace, had done it working into the darkness, on Sundays, beginning at dawn. We believed. And that was what Harry meant when he took and showed me that empty space with only one cottage standing on it. He had named it Victory House. It was a kind of war-memorial of an ancestral and supreme

devotion to Severn that epitomized the traditional countryman's passion and patriotism towards his own home. That brick cottage taught me more about the agony of the disintegrating Enclosures and Industrial Revolution than any printed word could convey. And it brings home to us, who have the good fortune only to read about it, the more agony of those Europeans torn from their homes wholesale by the Germans and the Russians.

These roots in the home-land or home-waters were once universal. My friend, Tom Hennell, the artist, wrote me the following from the Normandy front:

"One thing sticks out a mile; the fact that the last people to give up living normally—the only ones in fact with actual possession of a right to their way of life—are those whose immediate living is the land. These peasants and farmers go on ploughing immediately behind the field batteries; when their homes are actually destroyed, they move the surviving animals to some place that is slightly quieter and find means of carrying on without losing a day's work. The farmhouses and buildings are substantial and well-proportioned, as in the English stone country; and take a good deal of knocking down. But with the sea-side villas it is different: they come apart at the corners and shiver like matchwood. The class of people who used them seems to have vanished utterly."

It was nearly dark when we left. As we looked through the dusk at the great river, Harry pointed and said, "a kingfisher." All we could see was a bat-like shape that skimmed the surface and vanished. He knows Salopian Severn as other men know their right hands. For him it is the river of life.

III

Like his own Siv'n, Harry Rogers has a source. Except in so far as the river runs through Ironbridge, he has no relationship with an industrial town, however early, however uncorrupted. *To find his fellows, I have to go behind the Industrial Revolution* and from the industrial to the market town. In his wildness he does not even belong to that. But the self-governing community

of the market town has a long history, and the intense localism of its chartered independence would have been a righter milieu for him than anything and anywhere to-day.

Cobbett's own Farnham, restored with true insight, is a representative type of the small market town. In my neighbourhood Thame is one about which a local history has been written. But what the local history, excellent in its fashion, has left out, seems to me the most important thing about it.

Shut your eyes to the gauche and unseemly intrusions since the middle of last century (particularly the Market Hall) and open them wide to the generosity of the curves in this tiny town and the spaciousness of its layout; scan the diversity of its building materials and the succession of periods during which they were used. There are shapely compact little Queen Anne houses of many soft shades of brick, cream-washed and timbered houses that look like magnified country cottages, brackets, bargeboarding, inn-signs, alley-ways and courtyards, jettied top-stories, a specimen of a cruck house, eighteenth century fan-lights and other details spread over nearly twenty generations. This little town was the creation of its local craftsmen. They handed down their art from father to son and yet were always receptive to new influences that did not break with the tradition. This explains the unity of the pattern, the compatibility of one age with another and yet the smiling variety between house and house, period and period. The continuity of creation is stamped on every brick, tile and timber.

If further proof were needed, there is still a residue of craftsmen in the town who might be called the glowing embers of the creative fires that produced a work of art composed of a number of little masterpieces. That is the true term for the houses that made up the town. Up to the War, there lived here no fewer than four families of craftsmen—blacksmith, hurdler, shepherd and basket-maker—all of whom had had grandfathers in the same trade as their own. Add three others, a saddler, a cabinet-maker and a wheel-wright in a small way, and these men are the sole heirs of an inheritance and a way of life by the exercise of which utility, art and economics were interwoven aspects of a single whole. These men (the shepherd has gone now) own nothing but their workshops. But the whole principle of their work—and this work, with that of their brethren on the land, the peasant and the

yeoman, was nothing less than the making of England—was founded and maintained upon two invariable conditions, a flourishing agriculture and the widespread possession of private property.

The cabinet-maker is a small, rather grave man with a deep serenity written upon his worn but strongly defined features, which light up in his undemonstrative way when he talks about pike-fishing. This is his passion. All the leisure of his life is spent in gazing at his nangle. Though he is a master-man, an age that only values a beautiful piece of furniture if it can be labelled an antique prevents him from exercising his craft except by renovating what is old. To this he brings a truly exquisite skill and discernment, his own work, particularly in inlay, being indistinguishable from that of the clocks, chairs, tables, boxes, cabinets, chests and other furniture he restores to use and beauty.

His virtuosity in handling these treasures is extraordinary, and his historical knowledge considerable. He once showed me a Regency hipped needle-box which he had picked up for 3s. 6d., and virtually proved to me had been made from the roots of a pollard oak. If the universe was formed out of the primal chaos, his workshop is a model of it. For out of a kind of kitchen-midden dumped on the floor of his dark and dingy workshop, emerge the finest seventeenth century and Sheraton clocks in full working order, sun-dials, chased dressing-tables at which Lady Teazle might have sat before her visit to Joseph Surface, and other beauties of the times that created the antiques we only collect. In his quietism, his melancholy smile as he talks about them, his dignity and the rather formal courtesy of his address to me he too is of the times when they were made. Of the times not of this time or that time, because he belonged to every age that created beauty as a normal function of daily life. He belonged to any and every age, except the one in which he lived.

The hurdler appears to be the very antithesis of the cabinet-maker, tall, broad-shouldered, robust and confident, where the other has a gentle, diffident, undemonstrative presence in accord with his stature. Yet in their respective attitudes to life, in their detachment from the life of to-day, their poise, their serenity and their rootedness, theirs is a way of life which is for all time. Their aim is not a quick nor a profitable nor an ambitious nor an ornamental job, but simply a good one, perfectly adapted to its

particular function. Beauty comes as naturally out of it as blossom on a blackthorn, whose object is fruit not flowers.

In fine weather the hurdler works under the chestnut tree in the courtyard of which his Georgian cottage forms one side, another being the railway carriage that is his workshop when the weather says so. The tree was planted to commemorate the birth of his parents' first child, and to see him splitting and shaving his withies under it with its special family and personal associations is to experience a sense of timelessness different in degree but not in kind from that given by a work of art. When he had his son with him before the war, he used to make rack-hurdles, sheep-hurdles, lamb-hurdles, gate-hurdles, all of the Crack and White Willows, the parental stock of the Cricket-Bat Willow, abundant though neglected along the banks of the river that gives its name to the little town.

For many years it has been extremely rare for a hurdler to make so great a variety as he did. His lamb-hurdles, which have vertical instead of horizontal bars to let the lambs through, but not wide enough for the penned ewes to follow, have almost disappeared from the countryside owing to the disuse of folding sheep on the root-crops. Now that his son has gone to war, he has double the amount of work to do with half the labour, having had the curious experience of next to no demands on his services followed by exorbitant ones. But he keeps his organic balance through the unbalance of his age in which he lives and not too little nor too much labour can prevent him from telling tales of nature which is with us always and of the past that seems as remote as the stars. For all these men are great naturalists and chroniclers, their form of recognition of how close they live both to nature and tradition.

Fleet, the basketer, is the liveliest of these descendants of the Makers of England, but he is of Breton ancestry, and still wears his Celtic badge in his name, William Youens. When the stock came to England it was before the Huguenots. As, according to Fleet, his people have never been other than basket-makers, perhaps he is descended from the wattle-weavers of the Glastonbury Lake Village, who were notable craftsmen. But the England of the twentieth century stopped the contemporary Fleet from making baskets, and he had to put his vegetables into foreign ones instead. He had to go on producing, that being his nature, so he

set up a greengrocer's shop and sold in it the produce of his garden at back.

It was a raw, oozing, fog-bound day at the beginning of December when last I went to see him. It was like a legend that I found him making a Christmas Crib, the idea of which originated with St. Francis. A basket-maker come down from countless generations of basket-makers working on the happy idea of St. Francis, and since basketry is certainly as old as growing crops, using much the same methods in the making as the first colonisers of England. Whether St. Francis made his symbolic cradle out of withies like a creel or of thin pegged planks with panelled sides, hoods and rocking posts like the mediæval cradles, yet the sight of him weaving his crib was the epitome and emblem of Christmas. The greengrocer who grew his own greenstuff to sell in his shop, making a Christmas crib in the small market town that had only changed in our own century—was not this an act of unconscious homage to the principle underlying the Story of the Manger, where all is native, of the country, of the soil and the immemorial peasantry? The Eastern Star shone over the byre, not the palace of Herod; the Magi came to a farmyard and a craftsman's workshop, not to the Temple-Bank of Jewry. The Christ of the Trades, of the farm, the workshop, the peasant household, of the integrated, self-sufficient life on the land, it was to Him that wisdom and monarchy made pilgrimage, acknowledging the glorification not only of humility but of the roots of all civilisation and of the loving intercourse between man and earth.

All the implications of the craftsman's trade, its continuity, its virtue embedded in the soil, the family and the home, its natural goodwill towards man and nature, its modest but perpetual creation, these are all transfigured by the place and scene and narrative and circumstances of the Incarnation. So, in watching my basketer making his Christmas crib, I was looking into a sacred picture as rich in symbolism and ultimate meaning as a Giotto or a Fra Angelico.

Nor could the continuity of creation have been more faithfully represented. The discarding of old truths as out-of-date is certainly not applicable to basket-making. There is one way of making one kind of basket, another way for another kind, just as there is one glory of the sun and one glory of the moon. There

is no other way except by factory-basketing, and the difference there is not between one kind and another, nor between old and new, but between good and bad.

But a vital link in this ages-old but ever-renewed process which raises the craftsman above the flux of time was missing. The bundles of peeled and slender rods came from an Argentine not an English *salix*. He had a few of the Somerset withies, brown, like old tiles, from being boiled in the copper instead of being peeled by standing in water like the foreign rods. On September 23rd, 1829, Cobbett rode into Tring, and, seeing a case of straw for the straw-plaiting industry which was peculiar to the region and is now entirely obsolete, asked where it came from. When he knew it was from Tuscany, he, the Isaiah of our countryside, expressed his disapproval with that warmth and vigour natural to the old champion of the dispossessed poor.

In these yet sadder days I was witnessing the same thing. Why did these rods come from the Argentine when bundles 8 feet long take a lot of room on shipboard? Because the withy-aits and osier-beds which grew the finest rods in the world, the Berkshire long bud, the black maul of Northants, the Welsh grey with its green top, the yellow-budded purple-headed red and the whip-lash withy from the Sedgemoor rhines (Fleet knew as many as eighty varieties) which the basketers cultivated themselves in their own beds, are now but swamps, sedge-land, soaked blotting-paper land and good for nothing. They would have been useful to-day when the demand for baskets vastly exceeds the supply, and 99 per cent of the basketers are, like my man, old and retired with no apprentices.

My basketer sat down on his lap-board, and after "scalluming" the foreign rods (cutting slips out with the picking knife) proceeded to wale up the sides, "upsetting" as it is called, that is to say, building up the frame. The ogee shape of the cradle half-way along these sides he formed by stretching a slender withy across the middle and pulling it tighter as his eye measured the correctitude of the curve. We were in his outshut, and I sat, half-frozen and half-choked by the fog, watching him. I watched his hands weaving in and out, and the best description of what I saw is in two sentences that passed between us. "Do you know who taught me basket-making?" he said. "Yes," I said, "your ancestors." He nodded. He told me how the son of a basket-maker is always a

better artificer than an apprentice who is not connected by blood with the master. The son fiddles about with straw in his very babyhood, and a son of his made a half-bushel scuttle when he was nine. His parents still use it a dozen years later.

The hands betrayed such ancestry. They were moving of their own volition as though they were independent of his particular body and by a kind of self-rhythm that would have been uncanny but for the sureness and grace of it. They moved with incredible speed and yet in leisurely fashion, moved like the inevitable flow of a river in a musical motion and deftness. I watched them fascinated, and through their rhythm I was sensible of the orderly sway of the wind in the corn, of a chaffinch building its nest, of a horse thundering over a meadow, of clouds forming over the sky, of flame playing above a log in the grate, of ripples fluttering over the surface of a lake, of water in a mountain stream passing over its bouldered bed. Forgetting how cold I was, I saw for a moment the melodious motion of the whole universe, what Henry Vaughan called "the chime and symphony of nature." I thought of all the masterpieces of hearth and home, but that there was no masterpiece like the human hand that had made them.

And as he weaved he talked on and on, telling me one of those interminable stories that would bore the townsman, but which we countrymen love, because telling tales is the quintessence of country communication. It was about how in the last war when he was an artilleryman he had found his way into the cottage of a French peasant who happened to be a basket-maker. So Fleet gave a demonstration of his art, and the silent wonder of the Frenchman up to his ecstasy at the end (Oh, bon, bon, bon!) was conveyed with the dramatic touches, the verve and play of the voice of one who was part-French himself. The next day the cottager showed where he cut his rods; the Germans had been there and the neat beds of peasant thrift and minute intensive cultivation had gone back to aboriginal and forbidding wilderness. He did not say anything about his own osier-bed, which had gone back, like the peasant's, not from the anarchy of a foreign soldiery, but the money-system of his own nation.

So the tale went on with numerous parentheses, digressions, marginalia, but with its various strands interwoven like the meshes of his Christmas crib. The convolutions of a country

monologue may seem to be endless, but it will always be about things that have happened, as is natural to the concrete imagination of the countryman who, like the elephant, never forgets. Only the progressive forgets, poor victim of time who does not know how to repent, how to make time stand still, how to sit under the Tree of Life and look down the long years. For this making and this remembering are the true secret of life, and for a brief hour in the cold outshut I was taught by a master a part of the mystery of the overcoming of time.

IV

Burford was another market town built to serve the same regional needs. With its necklace of villages it was the same self-supporting little *civitas*, has much the same length of history, and, like Thame, was the creation of its local craftsmen. Burford itself is the witness to the honour of their calling. But though Burford and Thame were the product of the same culture, the same self-sufficient economy and conditions of livelihood and the same local inspiration, it is impossible to imagine towns more radically different in structure and appearance. They are different because the country is; wold replaces plain, stone clay. Our forefathers deferred to nature who is never the same from one place to another; to "conquer" nature is merely to standardise an unnatural ugliness everywhere.

Burford is also different from Chipping Campden twenty miles away, each on the last ridges of the Cotswolds east and north-west and both sheep-towns built of the same stone at the same time. There are fewer gabled houses in Burford and some of these are Dutch and rounded. There are more Renaissance ones with parapet or pediment. The princely Great House in Witney Street and another at the bottom of the high street with a rich Renaissance architrave suggest a slight elevation in the social scale above Campden with its single wool-stapler, Grevel. The oak lintel over window and door is the Burford idiom; the stone dripstone the Campden one. Campden is architecturally more homogeneous, more severely traditional, more too of a complete work of art. But Burford's stone gardens, the bridge over the Windrush, the flight of houses down the hill, the clean terminations at each end, botched at the top of the hill but intact at the

foot, these are Burford's alone. In how many towns in England can goldfinches be seen, as I saw them, in three gardens during the course of a single afternoon? Birds indeed are well pleased with Burford and more than 50 species frequent it. Both towns have many finials, stone-slatted oriels and roofs. But Burford is the richer in timber-work and there is no decorative bargeboarding in Campden. Though both towns are superlative for the line of their curves in the main streets, Burford has more architectural waywardness than Campden, one of the most purely vernacular market towns of stone in the world. But it was built out of an instinctive feeling for fitness of purpose and not in the least for "picturesque" reasons. Burford is a miscellany where the mason's fancy roams, and the happy ending of the great street in the Valley of the Windrush is felicity itself.

What an architectural history might be written of our small pre-industrial market towns! Leave Thame on the clay, Burford on the stone for Marlborough on the chalk. In Marlborough there is hardly a single house like another. Even the tile-hanging varies from house to house and the variety covers shades of brick, shapes of houses, and structure of windows. Yet in all this gay multi-formity there is unity.

Better, I should have thought, to build little towns like these of local skill and the local materials than the Beveridge idea of digging holes and filling them up again. Yet Nature who feeds us, who provides us the wherewithal to make cottages and cathedrals, who clothes the world in beauty and life, who offers us such endless possibilities for happy and contented lives, is always trying to bring us to our senses.

Of the intense and manifold life of old Burford only an inventory of its trades can speak. It spun wool, wove cloth, cast bells, worked metal, acted plays and kept more inns than a town twice its size; there were smiths, saddlers, maltsters, cabinet-makers, wallers, slatters, masons, artificers of many a kind. Now the busyness of Burford is of travellers that come and go and, in war, most strangely of tanks in procession. One of these, while I was there, crashed into the parapet of the bridge, broke it like matchwood and fell into the river. The dreams of Burford have become far from tranquil and soundless. Dreams, because the old regional life is not altogether dead, though very near its end. In another decade it will have vanished utterly.

But such has been the tenacity of its craftsmanship in a climate as hostile to it as the moon's for life that four old men, a metal-worker, a smith whose family has swung the hammer in Burford for three centuries, a saddler and a bell-founder, still live and ply their ancient trades. Two of these abide in Witney Street, and, if you walk down it, nothing is changed in appearance from what it was. You are not in the past because the street is empty and silent except for the distant roar of the high street; the past has flown forward to you. Can it ever die? With all my heart and mind I believe that it cannot because it gave a fullness and liberation to the workaday life of men that it is death to them to be without. And I think it is true that civilised man of to-day is not only absorbed with death but even as in *macabre* Germany pathologically welcomes it. This back street, retired, patient and quiet under the distant din of the tanks, seemed to wait for it to pass, knowing it to be fugitive and time-bound, realising that man must live and overcome death and that these noisy years of ours are

“moments in the being
Of the eternal silence: truths that wake
To perish never.”

In a decade the old life will have perished, but only to be reborn.

Mr. Bowl, the saddler, is in the eighties and has been saddle-making in the little shop where we talked together since 1877, first as an apprentice for five years for 1s. a week for the first two years and 2s. 6d. for the rest, and from 1895 as a master-man. He is in the eighties but he still rides to hounds, and, when he is not working, eating or sleeping, is horsed or working on his allotment. He became a riding master in the thirties owing to the depression in saddling and now works both at it and giving riding lessons till 10 p.m. On Sundays, he takes a walk for from six to eight miles. He is not even white-headed; his crown has still the redness of the Celt, though rusted, and his face is puckered with an age of smiles. There are none to follow him—his four sons leave leather well alone—and, though his trade will go with him, he cannot bring himself to let go and give up.

He still makes anything from a lawn-mowing shoe to a lady's dressing-case, anything but harness, the saddler's pride and

priority. He uses his own leather, preserved in oak bark tan and so saved from stiffening in chemicals. The horses of Burford have in his lifetime come down from a hundred and twenty to two. But he remembers this wealth of horse-flesh, and memory in a traditional craftsman is more than a faculty kept continually bright and keen. It is the very metal of his life. It is the reason why nearly all living craftsmen for all the loneliness of their survival in an age utterly estranged from them are not unhappy men. They carry the past with them into the wilderness, and it ceases to be the past. Mr. Bowl did not recall the past to me; he acted it.

I first met Mr. Bowl in the autumn of 1944 and what struck me was the spring-time of his old age. When he described to me the first motor-car in Burford and how he and fifteen others had pushed it up Burford Hill, he put out his hands as though he were still pushing. When he told me about the last oxen to draw a plough (he used to repair their harness) at Eastleach St. Martin, his arms and shoulders played the rhythm of their slow gait along the furrows. He spoke of the last self-sufficiency fair-cum-market at Burford, when a double line of booths stretched along the high street from top to bottom, 'when there was accommodation for 80 shepherds at the Lamb Inn and the carters and woodmen and others stood about with the emblems of their trades in their buttonholes, as though he had just left it. He made a few shuffling steps to illustrate one of the dances, in the evening of September the 25th. But it was forty years ago and the very last September fair of all the Septembers receding into the remote horizon of old England.

How could I think of the past of craftsmanship as for ever past when it had endowed this old man with a flame that only death, if that, could put out. In the bar-parlour of the Bull Inn on the other side of the street there is a settle topped by a box in which hams were cured. The heat of the sitter cured the ham and, because the familiars of the inn used to have each his chosen seat, the ham got to be called Will's or George's.

How highly developed as well as personalised was the old life! In another house of Witney Street, where lives the loyal and zealous townswoman of Burford, Miss Armes, I saw her copies of many of the designs of the land-workers' trades embroidered on their smocks, partly for recognition at the hiring fairs. But

I could not recognise them, so completely stylised and emblematic were the whips, sheep crooks, harness, etc., of the carters, shepherds and others who wore them. They were no more naturalistic than the White Horse of Uffington is a natural horse. Here was a folk-art mellowed and weathered for centuries.

Six months later I renewed my acquaintance with Mr. Bowl. It was then that I had a further revelation of him. He *is* Burford as it was, for though Burford still visually is more or less as it was, the inner life that built it and sustained it for age after age has departed. But as I passed the square window of his tiny shop and looked in on him bent over his broad bench from his high stool, this very old man with his astonishing memory and his ageless animation became a symbol and the last repository of the culture, the self-sufficiency and the multifarious bustle of the Burford that has gone. Burford lives again in him, and the pictures he gives of its former activities express both himself and the town in a liveliness and reality which identify both in a common rebirth.

He told me more about the Lamb Inn which had once belonged to his family for a century and a quarter. He remembered when a fat buck used to hang in the corner of the big room where now the bar is, and you might almost say he could hear the clatter of the venison parties during the September sheep fairs. The Burfordians used to have one day each year in Wychwood Forest, hunting the deer. The shepherds slept in a large dormitory upstairs and used to look forward to the celebrated home-brew of the inn even more than to the venison. Twenty fitches of home-cured bacon at a time used to hang in the cellar, and Mr. Bowl could see the women scraping the bristles and ladling the brine over the pigs fattened on the inn pastures. Outside he could hear the rumble of the horse-waggon coming up the street with the malting barley, the far-famed Cotswold barley grown on the brash of the Wolds. They passed the September ballad-singers, and Mr. Bowl there in his dim harness-cluttered shop sang me one of their songs—"And they calls I Buttercup Joe." Outside the Bull Inn, the farmers were sampling the corn with the pigeons fluttering down among them, while inside, after the farmers' ordinary, the handbell ringers gave a performance. The rustle of the sheep, the barking of the dogs, the nailed boots of the Cotswold cobblers—for a moment the little shop that smelled of leather and

age resounded with them, for a moment the wide Wolds, the streets of Cotswold stone and Cotswold timber and Cotswold men of Cotswold speech crowded into it.

At all times there was open house at Burford, and people were always dropping into one another's houses. "Everybody was ready to help each other: it's all so different now." There was Squire Fox: he was a "gentleman," and by that Mr. Bowl meant that he was hail fellow with all, and if any had need, he satisfied it. Not a stone fell from the walls of his estate (you should see them now!), not a man passed without greeting. In that congested shop arose the image of a whole community, depending upon itself for its work and celebrations, living by the cult of neighbourliness. And of the old life nothing remains but the shell, nothing survives but in the low voice, the bent body and the gesturing hands of this frail old man.

It had its shadows, of course, and the labourers were only getting eleven shillings a week (though much more *in kind*). But it was rich in life and that life was its own. Burford built itself and lived on itself. But now it depends upon radiations coming from without; its life or semblance of it is borrowed. Even the country girls, the mothers of the countrymen to be, drink ports and pink gins one after the other and dress like London. They do not make merry; they have a "good time." They do not bake bread and make cheese and butter and keep house as *Cottage Economy* enjoined; they work in factories. The more they drink, the more metropolitan is their chatter. They shocked Mr. Bowl, but Mr. Bowl belongs to an age that has passed.

But I cannot believe it. Burford is cruciform in plan, though by no means in the Roman fashion. Even the high street has nothing of Roman inflexibility. It ripples and sways down the hill, and so it accommodates itself to the rhythms of nature, not conforms to the geometrical chart. But, being cruciform, the little town has four ends or beginnings, and each of them begins or ends at a point: on one side is the country on the other the town. The traveller passes from one to the other at a stride, and from the sophisticated pseudo-polished voice of the announcer to the cawings of the rooks carrying building materials from field to tree-top and gossiping outside their nests on the high twigs. If they go on from age to age, can Burford die for ever?

The bell-founder lived in the same street as Mr. Bowl. His

cottage adjoined his workshop, distinguished from it by a low Gothic arch. At the back, a long and narrow garden sloped down to the willows of the river. Parallel with it the workshop was continued for half the garden's length, the longest craftsman's workshop I had ever seen. These details are by no means trivial: Mr. Bond worked both his garden and his workshop, the scene of a number of crafts serving the paramount one of bell-casting. Of the entire property he was the sole owner.

Mr. Bond is more fortunate than Mr. Bowl in this respect, in another not so. Since the war he has done a full-time job at the Rissington aerodrome. It has something to do with electrical installation and he is very well paid for it. Yet for every week-day of the weary years of war he has longed to be back at his bell-casting on which he can make perhaps half the money he is earning now. He *owned* his workshop and the bells in it were his *vocation*, satisfying his hands, his heart and his mind.

I knew this when I noticed the look in Mr. Bond's eye cast upon his rusting tools, the untidy tackle lying about the floor and the nettles ramping up the sides of the workshop walls. He had worked in it since 1890 and, echoing Mr. Bowl, he said, "I shall never retire." There are only two things that worry him: one is that every Monday morning he leaves his workshop; the other is to find somebody, a relation if not a son, a friend if not a relation, a stranger if not a friend, who will carry on the bell-foundry. His father and grandfather were bell-founders and in the churchyard is the early seventeenth century tomb of one more of the bell-founders of Burford.

As Mr. Bond took me through his workshop, I discovered that he was seven men in one. First, a carpenter. For the bell-wheels exact some tricky hoop-work, not unlike the wheel-wright's. Every wheel has a wooden "sole," steamed and bent into a wide circle and fitting closely to the iron wheel. Nobody, again, can cast bells without a lathe, operated by a small petrol engine; so he was a turner as well. Next, of course, a blacksmith; the forging is an extremely complicated business and requires a reverberative furnace built of brick from which the molten metal runs through a flue into the casting pit. He explained to me at length the delicacy of the varied technical methods employed by him and his assistant for controlling the flow of white-hot metal and guiding it into the mould. Since he built this furnace with

his own hands, he had also to be a bricklayer. A plasterer too. The cast metal is encased in an iron framework called a crinoline and is coated with a porous plaster made of sand and cowdung. But bell-founding is more than carpentering, turning, bricklaying, smithying, plastering; it contains them all, but the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Another profession he combines with casting bells is hanging them. For this job, together with picking up cracked bells to recast them, he had travelled far and wide over our countryside; we must have spent half an hour in remembering the villages and parish churches we both had visited. One village he knew well and I not at all—Little Massingham.

But I am not yet done with Mr. Bond's versatilities. His talk flowed on as a guide to his manifold skills for a full hour and much of it was completely over my head. As he said with his deprecatory smile, you had to know something of geometry and arithmetic to be a bell-founder, and his description of his tools, their uses and the fine parts of a bell blended art with science. To these aptitudes and this mastery he had yet one more to add. He was a gardener and fruit-grower. The only other worker in metals I know of who at all resembles Mr. Bond as a craftsman-philosopher is Mr. Brown of the Smithy at Gomshall in Surrey. Asked how he came to acquire his skill in wrought-iron work, he replied, "You see, when I was a boy, I learned the nature of metals." This exactly describes the quality of Mr. Bond. Indeed of all craftsmen. Their senses are attuned to, their minds versed in, their hands subdued to the nature of the materials they work in.

We were together on a Sunday and the glimpse I had of his family showed them dressed in the style of a much bigger town than Burford. But not he; Sunday was the day for pottering in his workshop and tending his garden. This full man dressed for the work he loved, and God had given him another sense for it independent of its mysteries of making, though essential to it. This was his exquisite ear. I can truly say that I have never in my life met another man with as fine a one. The veto on church bell-ringing during the early years of the war had one counter-effect to lighten its gloom; it brought back the hand-bell. He played many octaves on these with a tuning fork for my benefit and he had cast them all himself. He had something like genius for tone and its infinitesimal variations. A peal of eight bells can ring 40,232 changes and not a few of these he played for me. I

have a fairly good ear myself and can detect modulations in a bird's song out of the customary which are inaudible to or unnoticed by others. But when he took me over to a set whose notes, according to him, did not ring quite true, he had me beat. His extraordinarily sensitive ear could pick up the slightest falsities in percussion which were beyond me. Since he was also a lover of music—it is charming that a bell-founder should be one but it does not at all follow that he is one—such an ear qualified him to “ring the bells of heaven.”

Most of the craftsmen I know are wise and thinking men; this one had a conscious philosophy of life. I had first sight of it when we paused on our way down the workshop at the lathe powered by a small motor. I rather tentatively remarked that here was the secret of man's mastery of the machine which now dominated him to his confusion and undoing. To my surprise—we had only been talking for a few minutes—he perfectly understood, much better than I did in fact, that the only power that could control automatic power was the power of craftsmanship. I spoke from observation and reflection, he from experience and reflection, and he asked me whether I had noticed that the unbridled power of machinery had corresponded with man's loss of economic freedom. I had noticed it but now I became absorbed in noticing him. He definitely had a theory of property based on his own life as an owner and the artist-workman of his own bell-foundry.

This he expounded to me when we subsequently walked down his garden to the river hidden among its reeds and its willows. What pleased me more than anything was the part the garden as well as the workshop played in his ideas. He saw the complex as one thing, so that this Burford bell-founder seemed to embody in his own person the unity of the old England. The market town, the church bells, the society of craftsmen, the little owners of field and workshop, the land as the foundation of the whole structure, all met in him walking in his garden on a Sunday afternoon in memoried Burford.

As we passed along the flowers, the vegetables and the fruit between the drystone walls, he tapped two loaded apple-trees with the tuning fork, a Cox and the old-fashioned Annie Elizabeth, now rarely grown, telling me that he had planted all his trees himself. “They'll come in for somebody when I'm gone,” he said.

He went on to say how seldom he had found anybody who thought of things in that way, but that making and growing things for his family, for the town, but also for posterity meant everything to him. Making and growing, he saw the hyphen between them as a means to the good life. So, too, he upheld the principle of property as a stewardship as well as a means to freedom and self-expression. Though he did not use these precise terms, this was exactly what he meant. He was one of those rarest of contemporary men, a believer in the ideal of productive property to which modern finance, monopoly and totalitarianism are alike inveterately opposed. And herein he, whom the world would call one of the most old-fashioned of workmen, joined hands with the very modern school of Mr. Paul Derrick and others, who seek to restore freedom and "ownership" to each industry by making it the joint responsibility of their "operatives."

He often had arguments up at the aerodrome with the advocates of equality and State control. I wondered what they thought of him, solitary among them, as he advanced the moral and aesthetic claims of what he called the "Old Order" of master and apprentice, estate, workshop and holding, king, lords and commons. In this, he was deeply voicing the English tradition. Cobbett and Joseph Arch, both called revolutionaries and "radical agitators," expressed exactly the same sentiments and convictions. The revolutionaries of to-day are the ruling classes, bureaucrats and monopolists, both bent upon destroying the English tradition of personal property. The aerodrome workmen *are* all equal, Bond said, because they have no property; they are equal in proletarian poverty.

It isn't the rain and the drought, he said, that harm the garden but the foolishness of man, and the earth pays him back: here was Virgil's *justissima tellus*. To own was like rain and sunshine and fertility; it was only when owning was abused that things went awry. But the remedy was not to take people's property away from them but to teach them how to make it fruitful for themselves and others. The tonal harmonies of his bells came from more than hand and ear; they were the sound of a peace and wisdom within himself.

CHAPTER VI

COTTAGERS

"Farming practices whose only merit lay in their antiquity will be discarded."

BRITISH BANK ADVERTISEMENT.

"I have to liberate the world from dependence upon its historic past."

ADOLF HITLER.

WHY WAS the older cottager so tough and hardy? The answer is silence, for no social historian has considered the significance of such records as exist. Yet a very large proportion of our older cottagers lived to a ripe old age after a lifetime of arduous labour and in spite of such evils as fevers from insanitary conditions and rheumatism from constant exposure. A friend, for instance, tells me of a Worcestershire dame of ninety-one who ran a small farm herself and at the same time brought up a family of twelve, besides adopting five other children. She made every variety of home-wines and was famed for her mushroom catsup. Ordered to dress the meadow which provided her mushrooms with chemicals during the last war, she refused, but the field was forcibly fed. It has bred no mushrooms since. Last year, I heard of a Sussex woman of 109 years 5 months, who had worked hard all her long Old Testamentish life. On the day of her death she went down to the chicken run to feed the fowls and there dropped dead. The men of Arnhem died no better.

I may append to these testimonies another one from an estate agent who gave me what is perhaps the rarest of all the exhibits in my collection of "bygones," a pigmy flail with moulded handles and used with one hand for threshing out turnip or grass seeds.

"What a thousand pities it is that we have not more of the real old farm-labourers left to-day! Grand men most of

them were, and they were experts. Although I am agent for this place and have been for years, there are few jobs on a farm that I cannot do from hand-shearing upwards and downwards, and it was those men you write of that taught me. It was not a soft school either, and I well remember going for five successive years with one of the old sheep-shearing gangs—first year, catch and tie for them; second year, catch, tie up the fleeces and open up the bellies of the sheep—after that I was promoted to the actual shearing, which I had to learn to do with both hands. We started daily at 4 a.m. till 8 a.m. and then on till noon with half an hour out. One p.m. to 4.30, then tea for half an hour and then on till 8 p.m. when we were done for the day. In five years of my time as pupil at one farm, I never had a half-day off that I did not have to make up on my day's work first. How many of the youngsters of to-day would stand that pressure?"

Another letter came from an old-time scytheman whose ground for writing was that he could not bear the countryside to be regarded "merely as an annexe to the big cities" nor Nature to be "reduced to a matter of figures and machines."

When he was eleven and a carter's lad, he used to walk ten miles every Sunday to see his parents and ten miles back again to start milking. When he was thirteen, he milked, bedded down and tended seven cows without any help. About 1880 he became ploughman and carter on a farm near Leek, working from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. and as well as his normal work carrying coal from the pithead. At harvest, he also went out into the cornfields with a group of twelve or twenty using the "badging hook," and into the hay with the scythe. When he was twenty-three he got married and took on a holding of twelve acres of his own, running it with his wife as well as working as a labourer for neighbouring farmers. In off-times he used to break four tons of stone a day at the parish quarry. He cleaned "dykes" and preferred the rate of 2d. the rood of eight yards to that of 8s. a week because he could make more. Once a week, he used to walk six miles to Leek market carrying a basket with 200 eggs in it on one arm with 12 pounds of butter on the other.

Such examples could be multiplied indefinitely by research not into books but the memories of old cottagers. I shall give

but one more because it concerns Harry Rogers of the last chapter. His father, Tommy, was a poacher in the picaresque tradition of the nineteenth century countryside. He drank nothing but beer (in almost fabulous quantities), never wore an overcoat and lived hale to eighty-two. "They," as Edmund Blunden has written:

"They were men of pith and thew
Whom the city never called."

I believe that one of the reasons for the robust longevity of the old folk was the survival of pride and satisfaction in work after their nurse, personal ownership, had been taken from them by the Enclosures. They in their turn depended upon the vitality of the small more or less self-supporting local community which was also long a-dying. I quote from a letter received from a Greek weaver of tapestries, carpets and brocades. It gives an oblique glimpse of the kind of independence, self-support and worth-whileness in work that drew *Cottage Economy* from Cobbett.

"My father was a fruit-grower in Greece where I was brought up, and this heredity and upbringing have left their mark. I have revisited Greece many times since and it saddens me to see all the changes that have taken place, especially during the last twenty or thirty years. In my childhood, the peasant arts though declining were not yet dead, and in my father's youth every single item of food was produced on the parental farm and all the textiles and household requisites such as soap, candles, etc., were made in the home. There were no 'shops' in the town but only 'workshops' and articles like furniture, pottery, hardware and utensils of all kinds were ordered and bought on the site where they were made. Itinerant vendors supplemented or supplied the needs of the smaller households."

A "primitive" way of life? One at any rate highly favourable to the health and happiness of the community.

This introduces the second and allied reason for the vigour of the cottager against bad pay, bad drainage and overwork. It was the quality of the food eaten. I turn again to my correspondent,

the scytheman. He lived mainly on oatmeal cakes "shaped like gramophone records." Every cottage had its own "bakston" or bake-oven for baking the oatmeal which was eaten with home-made butter or cheese. Almost the only meat was home-snares rabbit or pork and cured hams from the cottager's pig. There were wines from the home-hedges, trout and pike from the farm fishpond and a restricted amount of orchard and cottage-garden fruit. Then comes what may have been the most important item of all. "Contractors used to collect night-soil from the towns and sell it to the farmers for their land."

Food was thus organically grown. But the methods of preparing it must also be taken into account. Another letter I received was from Mrs. Peggy Goodman, who farms in Wales and is an authority on milling oatmeal. She wrote in high praise of the traditional Welsh folk-cookery as tested not only by its palatability but by the number of elderly people found in every village who had profited by it. Their sight, hearing and digestions were quite unimpaired by age, as was their physical and mental vitality. One of them was a Welshman who lived on Welsh oatmeal in hot water from the age of sixty-five onwards, one large bowlful every day. He died at 104. But it was not the same story with those younger people who had replaced the oatmeal, milk, butter and potatoes of these veterans' childhood with white bread, margarine and tea. Cobbett's belief in wholeness of living was not, therefore, theoretic. It was based on his own observations on the benefits of physical health and psychological sanity derived from it.

So much for the individual cottager between his time and ours. But Cobbett's appraisal of the past was based on his cottagers having formed self-supporting communities. The Enclosures, he said, had produced effects so injurious that those responsible for them "might begin to suspect that the District Councils were not so very foolish when they had in region goes back fields and when almost every man that had a sham Abbey established and, either large or small." A letter to it-growing but the small-Dr. W. G. Hoskins, describes the Leicestershire reveal that the small

Magna as an example of a free and self-governing cottager community. It was composed mainly of peasant proprietors without a resident lord since Domesday "or even earlier." They made their own bye-laws for village and field, managed their own church and its finances, ran their own guild and "in short did everything for themselves and were an absolutely independent community." Their mode of life, he added, was a "civilisation in the best sense of the word."

Had Cobbett been alive to-day, he would still have found many small-holders, but only a minority practising subsistence husbandry and that incompletely. He would have found only one village, Laxton in Nottinghamshire, where the system of common fields survived in conjunction with family holdings. He would have become aware of a strong movement in high places for the dispossession of the small-holder as "uneconomic" and the absorption of his plots in "large-scale economic units," a final instalment of the Enclosures. A letter from a small-holder who cultivates or cultivated 17 acres on the southern slopes of Dartmoor explains the consequences of the W.A.C. insisting on him becoming a part-time worker off his holding and throws an oblique light on this movement:

"I told the W.A.C I couldn't do more than I was doing here. . . . But they were determined that the small subsistence farm must go and I must become an insured worker. They say we produce nothing: we feed 8 people almost entirely, sell several dozen eggs a week, several tons of potatoes each year, hundreds of cabbages and broccoli, sacks of sprouts, one or two yearlings, about 6 pigs for bacon (purchased at a loss). This year we had finally to say good-bye to the tractor, and we do all our own work in every respect. This year, too, we hoped for the first satisfactory profit, £100 in kind and £125 in cash, less £25 expenses. This country I feel is hopeless from our point of view. All we can hope is to keep our family together until we can get on. There is clear that our way of life must go. As the 'native' way of life you must move with the times or get out." Ath and happiness o.

Thus introduces the second

the cottager against bad pay, of a much richer piece of land. This the quality of the food eaten. "mes" so heartily that, returning

nothing, he has taken since the war five white straw crops in succession. Presumably because he is so well abreast of the times, the W.A.C. has left him indulgently alone. In what direction are the times actually moving? Starvation looks Europe in the face, and there are no further areas of virgin soil in the world to be exploited for "cheap food."

Cobbett, in his Rural Ride through the twentieth century, would have come into contact with one community of small-holders at once numerous, vigorous and prosperous. How has such a community contrived to survive and in what ways does it conform to, in what fail to conform to, the principles laid down in *Cottage Economy*? Does it fulfil the first mission of the small holder, to provide a good living for his family from his own production and sell his surplus, preferably to the neighbours, as provision for the rainy days? Or, like the farmer above, does it sell everything off the holding in exchange for cash? Are the holdings mixed and do the wives bake and cure bacon and pursue the domestic crafts? Have they by this wholeness of living achieved something like a local and co-operative democracy like that of Wigston? If so, how can it maintain itself in the face of an economic system that aggravates the evils Cobbett saw in its earlier phases?

The example comes from the Vale of Evesham and the answer to these questions is mixed. But one answer is unequivocal. The small-holders of the Vale, living side by side with market growers of big acreages but not depressed by them, owe their flourishing condition, not to the soil as is erroneously supposed, but to a very ancient system of land tenure, the "Evesham Custom." It was created, not by the enlightenment of squire or lord of the manor, but the old Commoners themselves. The present system of tenancy is directly founded upon it. My knowledge both of the history of the Evesham small-holders and their present life and economy is derived from my own explorations of the region in the nineteen thirties and from my old friend, Mr. C. H. Gardiner, Clerk to the District Council.

Good cultivation in the Evesham region goes back as far as 700 A.D. when the monks of Evesham Abbey established not only market-gardening and fruit-growing but the small-holder. All the records of the Borough reveal that the small

master thrived there for more than a thousand years under the open field system. Then came the Enclosures and down he went. But when farms became vacant in the depression after 1874, the landlords, remembering the consequences of the past, cut them up and let them to the labourers. The opportunity was given them of cultivating their new farms according to the counsels of *Cottage Economy*. They took it and became entirely self-subsistent. They used only family labour and lived on what they produced. They were heartened in this epic struggle by two signal advantages. One was the frequent presence of Joseph Arch in the neighbourhood with his programme of small independent mastership. The other was the survival of the Evesham Custom of their forefathers.

This gave the small man two securities and incentives. One was a very unusually generous valuation of tenant right which enabled him to profit by intensive cultivation of and improvements to his land. The other was the power of nominating a new tenant to his landlord who, if satisfactory, was bound to be accepted. This meant that notices to quit were and are rare. The equally unusual enlightenment of the County Council and the Small Holdings and Allotments Act of 1908 had the effect of ratifying and extending the encouragements of the Custom.

Yet in the Borough the average holding per man is only $7\frac{1}{2}$ acres and the larger peasants rarely cultivate more than 20 to 40 acres. There are few landless and even the casual labourer tills a small plot. The wife shares her husband's self-respect and independence by herself earning on the land. House-pride and so the housewifely crafts of jam-making, wine- and cider-making and other domestic arts are normal. The social relations between master and workman retain the old friendliness and familiarity there; reciprocal services and co-operation are a common feature of the local life. In the spring of this year (1945), for instance, thirty of these small-holders, including a soldier on leave and a boy to hand round tots of cider, turned up to put to rights the asparagus bed of one of their number who was ill. There was no committee nor overseer and the spontaneity of the neighbourly act was taken for granted in all the villages about. Fifty years ago, ten villages combined to have a piped water-supply installed, and horses are jointly owned to-day as oxen were in the pre-Enclosure village. Every inch of land is utilised, the marshy bits being

planted with withies for tying the abundant produce. While the farming population of the Vale has declined, the small holding one has doubled itself in a century and the Parish Councils are active. Before local milling of whole-grain flour was made illegal by a Government acting thus as the agent of the milling combine, the Valesmen grew wheat for local milling. Their women baked the flour in their own ovens and set aside the bran for the cottage pig. The passages on bread and pig-keeping in *Cottage Economy* might have been texts on the homestead's wall.

The traditional background of this busy and enterprising community is thus manifest. A particular witness in point is the survival of the strip system of the open fields whereby the holdings of a villager were scattered over the whole parish, some on the good ground, some on the poor, for fairness' sake. This practice set the advocates of Enclosure in full cry: what could be more time-wasting and uneconomic than for the peasant holder to be plodding to and fro with his carts and implements between one of his strips and another, perhaps half a mile away? Why then do the virile small-holders of Evesham Vale retain the antiquated principle of the scattered strip? For three very good reasons. It enables them to live in their own villages instead of on their holdings which they easily reach by bicycle. Thus the village community remains compacted. It makes practicable the growing of particular crops in the different areas best suited to them and each holder to order his crop varieties into a pattern. Thirdly, he can increase or reduce his various strips as need or convenience arises. But the real answer is that the system works extremely well, as doubtless it did in the open fields community or it would not have survived for a thousand years.

All who know the small holdings of the Vale testify to their extraordinary productiveness. Yet the Vale soil, though good, is not exceptional. Being low-lying, it is liable to flooding from the Avon and to late May frosts. Part of it is clay land, which requires the continuous working that only the peasant or his descendant gives to it, and part the much lighter "river terrace" soils most liable to be affected by drought. Mr. Gardiner told me that a small holder, showing a party round, remarked:

"The soil's nothing to do with it. You could dump us anywhere in England and in two years we should have adjusted

ourselves to local soils and other conditions, and we'd be on our feet."

A. H. Savory in *Grain and Chaff from an English Manor* (1885) wrote of the Evesham labourers struggling to become landholders:

"These men, by their unceasing labour and self-denial, were just beginning to turn the corner; they had cleaned the land, ameliorated its mechanical condition by application of soot and deep digging with their beloved forks . . . and the well-merited return was coming in increasingly year by year."

It is vital, therefore, to observe how these men of the spade and fork have coped with modern machinery. In my experience, the craftsman and the husbandman not only do know how to cope with it without forfeiting the personal skill of and interest in their work but are the only existing types who can. The Valesman uses a small motor cultivator which is in fact nothing more than a power-driven breast-plough. I have one of these in my collection of agricultural by-gones. A glance at it reveals its very bulkiness and unwieldiness as a measure of the high skill it once exacted. Now mechanical power has circumvented the primitiveness of the implement without sacrificing the aptitude of its use. Men of the Vale still take it to the local blacksmith for adjustments and attachments to fall in with particular needs. Man is still the master. This is of supreme importance to those who desire man to remain and continue as man. Yet for years before the war the busybodies were at the Valesmen. They were "uneconomic"; they were not scientific and technical enough, while Sir Daniel Hall proposed hitching them on compulsorily to become "producing units in large-scale enterprise." Mr. Gardiner is anxious about their future. To save them from commercial and totalitarian attentions, he exhorts these traditional peasants to take a dose of "technical education and scientific research." Being what they are, they can be trusted to do so without fear of an overdose, just as they can be trusted with machinery. One of them, visiting a soil analyst at the Long Ashton Research Station, mentioned that "scientific research" is useless unless subordinate to practical experience, just as automatic machinery is an incubus unless

subordinate to hand-skill. It is for what they are, not for what they do, that they are imperilled. They produce abundantly without the aid of bull-dozers and multiple ploughs. But it is because they are small rural peasants that they are out of favour.

III

Yet their marketing has become contrary to that of a peasant economy. For they have perfected an elaborate system of exporting their produce. Their markets are distant as well as at hand and the urban merchant has more dealings with them than the local distributor. Alternatively, a commission agent sells their produce for them and (I am speaking of the days before the control of prices) gets what he can for it. These agents, pivoted on the central markets, including Covent Garden, usually appoint a local representative and some time passes before the growers even know what prices have been obtained for their fruit and vegetables. Yet so strong is the cohesion of this peasant community that mutual confidence between the agent and the small holder is the rule.

Even so, they could hardly have survived the modern system of profitable export at the expense of self-sufficiency without some measure of self-protection. This they have built up to the east of Evesham by the co-operative society known as the Littleton and Badsey Growers, founded in 1909 with a capital of £154. The society is the direct outcome of the Valesmen's "dependence upon their historic past." It springs from the ages-old and ingrained habits of co-operation in the village community of the open field. Both its personnel and its activities show it. The original members were mostly ex-farm labourers who had climbed to mastery. It closely represents the interests of the small holder by undertaking his purchasing and marketing affairs. It supplies him with the equipment he needs, relieves him of business and clerical data and runs an advisory and intelligence service on the most marketable crops. It even to some extent stabilises prices by large advance contracts with the big buyers and processors. It cultivates land of its own and arranges trial vegetable plots. Free of the methods of coercion and regimentation proposed by Sir Daniel Hall, the members are under no obligation to sell any

of their produce to it. The society is in short a kind of buffer state between the small-holders and the market.

Consider to what he was and is exposed in the predatory open market! Some figures given by Mr. Hugh Quigley in 1944 reveal how the producer, especially the small one, is penalised. In the years between the wars, the price-gap between producer and consumer for every pound of fruit was 2d. or 3d. In 1944, the distributor's margin in all the items of soft fruit was only a trifle lower than the price paid to the producer. For a pound of loganberries, for instance, the grower received 7d. and the middleman 6½d., the consumer paying 1s. 1½d. Since these prices were fixed by the Ministry of Food, it is clear that the go-between is fattened at the expense both of the consumer and the grower. In many classes of produce, a hundred per cent margin between the grower's and the retailer's prices compels the former to sell at or below the cost of production, especially if he be a small one without reserves.

The moment the small Valesman risked himself in this export market, he became subject to fluctuations of prices which between 1921 and 1932 brought wheat down from 21s. 2d. to 5s. 5d. per cwt., barley from 25s. 2d. to 8s. 10d. per cwt., oats from 19s. 10d. to 6s. 6d. per cwt. He came into contact with a system whereby one villager sells a lettuce to another *via* Covent Garden and plum jam made at Frocester in the South Cotswolds is sold by order to a firm in Pershore, the plum-centre of Worcestershire. Newcastle produces coal; so carry it there. By this canon of profitable export, the self-sufficiency upon whose rock the small holdings of the Vale were founded becomes "economic defeatism."

The staple of their production is fruit, vegetables and now to a lesser extent dairy products. Into what a cosmic gladiatorial show of competition were they caught when they stepped into the arena of the markets for these "protective" foods! Before the great wars began, one London firm was receiving 20,000 cases of eggs per week from Austria, Russia, Rumania and Galicia. In one year we got from Russia 640 millions of eggs, from Italy 315 and from Denmark 422. In that same year, Denmark exported to us 168 million pounds of butter, so that, in order to feed herself with it, she had to import it from Russia. The next year, France exported to us 2256 tons of "fresh" vegetables, 1000 tons per day of potatoes from St. Malo alone and from one region 2000 packets

of parsley. Even the Argentine joined in by exporting fruit and rabbits to us whose fruit rotted on the trees and pastures were rabbit-sick. Between 1920 and 1939, two cargo and two passenger boats plying between Boulogne and Folkstone discharged in one season 2500 packages of "fresh" foods per hour. The cream of this progressive economy appears in another item from St. Malo. In one year this port sent us over 773 tons of blackberries. And while the foreign bees buzzed about their native flowers to satisfy this gigantic system of sponging, the hedges met across our fields, our gates fell off their hinges, our producers were in pawn to the banks and our countryside was in rags.

It is one of the wonders of unwritten history that the small Valesmen could possibly stand up to such a hurricane of price-cutting and underselling. How did they? By retiring when times were at their worst within their inner citadel, the fortress of the family subsistence holding. In other words, they fell back upon the principles of livelihood as advocated in *Cottage Economy*, the victory of their grandfathers, the strength of their fathers and their own refuge from the financial furies of economic warfare. Being still peasants by blood and in the sizes of their holdings, they reverted to peasants by practice. It was because in their modern enterprises they kept the road back from falling into disrepair that they survived a period which has proved to be an Ice Age for the independent small man.

But to compete in the Covent Garden markets entailed specialised cash-cropping, while mass-producing these crops turned over their holdings to factory methods. So complex and delicately poised are the relations between crop and stock on a self-supporting farm, however small, that to tamper with a part is to dislocate the balance of the whole. Once they became dependent on the markets instead of themselves, their whole economy was threatened and, when the present war came, they could not help themselves. Most of their stock did go, just as the stock of the old Commoners went when their commons were enclosed. They had to export more than their surpluses and the cash they received in exchange was no return to the land. The holdings of the Land Settlement Association have been called "horticultural suburbs"; the long lines of Council houses stringing village to village in the Vale of Evesham are the reflection of an inward change from a rural towards an urban mentality. The

spirit of place is departing, and it was the impact of place upon person that created the Evesham Custom. An old Spanish proverb runs: "'Take what you will,' said God, 'but pay for it.'"

This is not to imply that the Valesmen have gained the world by the aid of but in the end to the loss of their traditional integrity. They still provide their families with all the vegetables they need, and they have a healthy taste for plenty. There are few who do not grow a patch of potatoes which are not for sale. Again, they retain the "prue" of misshapen buds of asparagus for home-consumption. They are too small and slender for tying into good class bundles for export and, from the point of view of flavour, many of the growers prefer this "prue" to the full-sized buds. The preparations at the pot for the Sunday dinner retain something of the solemnity of a rite, still more so if the meat is home-cured pig, and the pig has by no means become a bygone like the little plot of corn.

Yet a timeless mixed subsistence husbandry cannot be accommodated to the economics of the dealer and the broker nor satisfy the insatiable demands of industrialism without paying for it. Something has to go. What go as always are the intangibles which have been the great reward of such husbandry, quality and fertility. Its reward but also its foundations. When Lewes had a flourishing local market, it issued a Report in 1925 on the value of "a cheap local supply of fresh vegetables and fruit." A letter I received from a railway solicitor may be placed beside it:

"The food in the canteen is the worst I have ever seen anywhere and all peas come out of tins and all soups are made of Bisto. . . . Everyone from the chief engineer of the railway downwards complains of the food but deficiencies are put down to restricted imports and war-time conditions. When I suggest that enough food could be produced locally I am regarded with wild incredulity. Food is produced by the Hotels and Catering Department who must purchase it from London through the usual channels."

By interlocking their traditional economy with this ephermeal one, the small-holders of the Vale inevitably forfeit that quality which with independence and security from destitution prompted *Cottage Economy*. A constant supply of fresh foods is the condition

of health, local marketing the condition of that supply, and both the condition of quality. If the Valesman himself escapes the consequences of breaking those conditions by feeding his family on what he produces, it is evident that the consumer does not.

IV

Soil-conservation is the bedrock of a self-supporting husbandry. The quality of the food produced depends on the quality of the land that produces it. If the cottage economist exports more than his surpluses and has little or no livestock to restore to his land the equivalent of what he takes out of it, he is exporting his fertility. This axiom applies with especial point to the land of the Vale of Evesham which, on the analogy of the French *petit culture*, bears a rapid succession of heavy vegetable crops. Nor can the small-holder afford to allow even a small portion of his land to remain unproductive. The quantity of land available is too limited and the rents are too high for him to experiment with seed mixtures or a clover ley. These, anyway, would profit his land little unless fed off by the livestock he no longer possesses. Since the war, too, he has had to plough up or grub up his grass orchards, a measure which temporarily increases fertility at its greater expense in after years.

How then does he cope with this excessive drain upon the life-force of the soil, he who is the least likely of cultivators to disobey the biological law of return? He uses what farmyard and pig manure he can, which is very little. So he is compelled against all his best instincts and traditions to rely in the main upon "prepared" fertilisers. Mr. Gardiner, who has given such faithful service to the small-holders of the Vale and been their friend, counsellor and champion for so many years, tells me that there "appears" to be no general decline in the fertility of the Vale. But he also tells me that the clay lands stand up much better to the fierce intensive cropping than the lighter soils. These are quickly affected by drought and show an earlier loss of humus. It is a *correlative to the rule of return that no land suffers from drought*, no matter how prolonged, if it be well stocked with humus which possesses a seemingly magic power of retaining moisture. It is, therefore, clear that these lighter lands are being denuded of their

humus, which is quite literally their life. There is as much prospect of restoring the humus of these soils by "prepared" fertilisers as there is of bringing a sick man back to health by repeated doses of brandy.

But the Valesman has not been a cottage economist for nothing. There runs in his blood a perception of right values and of the right relations between man and the earth which is always cropping up in the most unexpected way. He does not delude himself that an organism like the soil can survive on substitutes for organics. So he clamours for the sewage sludge which is locally made and approved by the sanitary inspector and the medical officers. But since the quantity available is less than half he needs, he has to be rationed.

A few municipalities have converted their town wastes into an organic manure with wholly satisfactory results. It can be manufactured at £3 a ton, and other municipalities could follow suit. In South Africa, the National Veld Trust has been formed to combat the appalling spread of erosion by, among other measures of soil conservation, the extensive use of composts and sewage sludge from the towns. Sewage sludge is, of course, a kind of compost and a letter I received from Rhodesia is very pertinent to the dilemma of the Valesmen of Evesham. The writer was shocked at us in England not only defying the rule of return and exporting far too much of our farm produce to the towns but "letting most of the residues run down the sewers to the ocean." His account of a Rhodesian experiment of which he was the pioneer shows the way out for the Valesmen.

Captain Moubray cultivates thousands of acres in Southern Rhodesia and the land, when he took it over, was as poor outside dust-bowls as any in the Empire. Lord Bledisloe, who paid him a visit, said he had never seen such worked-out stuff, while Dr. Bennet, the head of the U.S.A. Soil Conservation Bureau, remarked that he could see no way of such land ever growing enough proper food for the population to feed itself. It was this same Dr. Bennet who, in his Report on South African agriculture issued in 1945 under the auspices of the Union Government, told what one prays is no longer an indifferent world that one-quarter of the Union's entire area in cultivation has been lost to the dust-bowl. Malnutrition was the curse of Rhodesia especially among the poor whites and the natives, exposing them to all

manner of deficiency diseases. The story of what Captain Moubray has done is, therefore, epical.

He was one of the very first farmers to introduce Sir Albert Howard's Indore Process into South Africa and he himself makes hundreds of thousands of tons of compost for his farm every year. On it he grows 15,000 citrus trees and from it exports 15,000 cases of fruit each year. He has 75 acres down to tobacco and produces 2000-3000 bags of maize, great quantities of tomatoes, sweet potatoes, soya beans and other crops. They are not dissimilar, therefore, to the market-garden crops of Evesham. But as the Valesmen have not, he has a flock of sheep and 500 head of cattle. Thanks to him and a few others, Rhodesia now practises the principles of soil-conservation on a large scale. Hundreds of miles of contour banks have been built; green cropping is becoming general and not only are the rotations strictly observed but the Government gives a 2s. bonus on properly rotated maize. The effects of this composting and the return to husbandry allied to it have been stupendous. Captain Moubray lives in one of the unhealthiest districts of South Africa. His three sons, now Spitfire pilots, he himself now an old man with a broken back, his farm workers and those of other farms that pursue the same methods, are in robust health. So are the crops and stock. In a few years a revolution has been accomplished by methods described in England as the dreams of sentimentalists.

This is not the end of the story. Captain Moubray, a student of soils, discovered a phosphorus deficiency partly by the difficulty of setting grain and partly by observation of wild and domestic animals in their relish for raw bones and bonemeal. He therefore made a phosphatic compost from raw rock phosphates which, in the process of fermentation, were converted into an organic compound. He discovered a potash deficiency one year from the cracking of his tomatoes at the calix end and one of boron another year from "hard skin" in his oranges. Why, when he was using all his vegetable residues, green manuring and wasting no dung? It was because of the enormous quantity of agricultural produce he was exporting. As he says himself, when all wastes were returned in China for 4000 years, there was never any decline in fertility. But the Chinese holding was self-supporting, and in our sense of the term there was no export trade at all. There was an exchange of surpluses. But modern demands on the farm all over

the world to feed the big towns have upset this economy. When a farm exports more than its surpluses, its organic residues are insufficient to meet nature's rule of return.

So it is in the Vale of Evesham. Unless every town in Worcestershire returns in composted sludge to the small grower what they might receive in fresh fruits and vegetables, the insurance of good health, the fertility of the Vale will continue to decline. Greater London is the richest market-garden land in the whole temperate zone. This runs for miles at its own doorstep along the alluvial Thames Valley, now largely a series of "built-up areas." In time, its concern for its own health might relieve the Valesmen from the pressure of an economic system that must in the end destroy their cottage economy, their livelihood and their land.

Thus the modern discovery of how to convert town wastes into humus may be the humble instrument of restoring to England the regional self-government she has lost. The only way to achieve it is for town and country to become once more inter-dependent on a regional basis. If they become so in the fundamentals of life, soil and food, they will become so in the cultural and economic superstructure that spring from them.

Though the self-supporting foundations of the Evesham peasantry are being tunnelled away, they are still heirs to their traditions of subsistence holdings. Mr. Gardiner has told me that in the winter of 1944 he took a photograph of one of these small holders "breaking in" his fourteen-year old son in the hand-digging of the heavy blue Lias clay of parts of the Vale. There were $4\frac{1}{2}$ acres to be done and they had nearly finished a 2-acre strip. The little boy was all smiles, and the father is an ex-sergeant-major who has a rooted objection to a digger straightening his back otherwise than on the parade ground. Whatever compromises it has made or been compelled to make, the heart of the Vale community is still sound.

CHAPTER VII

SOMERSET YEOMAN

"Great things are done when men and mountains meet,
These are not done by scurrying in the street."

WILLIAM BLAKE.

COBBETT was a yeoman who made himself the voice of an older England threatened by new forces. The yeoman was the rural middle class, and the period of the late Tudors and early Stuarts was the most favourable to it in our history. Gregory King's Tables in 1688 give the number of the larger yeomen as 280,000 and of the lesser 660,000, nearly one-fifth of the entire population. A man of substance, content to remain in his station, whether of many or few acres, he yet had plenty of healthy intercourse with the lesser gentry with whom his children intermarried, and was at the same time the aristocracy of the peasantry. He frequently defended the copyholders in "resisting pressure from above," especially from the wealthy merchants turned landlords. Many yeomen too were millers, innkeepers, smiths, keepers of ordinaries, glovers, miners, glassmakers, iron-workers in the Sussex Weald and clothiers as well as farmers.¹ To a small extent, this dual occupation survives to this day. The village innkeeper, for instance, is still to be found who owns and works his own farm. The miller-yeoman is a further example, but he has all but vanished. This coupling of field and workshop in the same man lasted right up to the Industrial Revolution which destroyed the interdependence between them.

The goodman's housewife was likewise a tower of strength in maintaining the self-sufficiency of our forefathers. She was a whole row of town-shops in herself. With his husbandry and craftsmanship and her baking, brewing, flax-weaving, wool-spinning, cooking, preserving, gardening and house-management,

¹ *The English Yeoman under Elizabeth and the Early Stuarts*, by Dr. Mildred Campbell, 1944.

the yeoman's family honoured the principle of home and self-help which Cobbett demanded. The yeoman represented homeliness in the richest sense of the term. Though thrift, industry, simplicity and "good neighbourhood" were the watchwords of this "plaine honest man," he lived well in his roomy house made of the local materials. It had solid furnishings, feather beds, many sheets and quilts, tapestry and wainscoting, pewter, silver (apostle spoons) and "fine naperie." The farmstead itself was accompanied by dairy house, bakehouse, brewhouse and barns. Nothing was imported but sugar (where honey was not used) and spices for the innumerable puddings.

Gervase Markham and others have been unanimous in praise of his husbandry, and a man who makes three to four ploughings for every crop may be trusted to know his way about his own fields. "Yea, a seasonable industry can turn stones into bread and make barrenness itself fruitful" is a yeoman's own words. In our own days, when loss of fertility is worldwide, a modern writer¹ has advocated four ploughings or the use of the harrow alone as the only means of incorporating organic humus into the surface soil. So the old yeoman becomes a pioneer.

There are two good reasons why the yeoman should have survived in West Somerset and the south-west more tenaciously than elsewhere. First because they have been a country of small enclosed farms from the Middle Ages onwards: the open field system was never widely represented there. Secondly, because these small farmers possessed a constant market for centuries in the western cloth industry. Hooker² wrote that the "husbond mann" of Devonshire kept "cattals oxen horsses and kyne . . . he hath also sheepe . . . it is by some affirmed that the numbere of sheepe in this countrie is as greate or greater than in any sheere (shire) in this Lande." What applies to Devon also applies to West Somerset. The small mixed farm was the making of thousands of yeomen and small owners, as they made the small farms. Though Cobbett did not explore this country, it is here that the survivors of the Cobbett tradition are to be found in groups rather than in stray individuals.

Here too farms not a survivor of the Cobbett way of life but a

¹ Edward Faulkner in *Ploughman's Folly*, 1945.

² See *The Reclamation of the Waste in Devon, 1550-1800*. Vol. XIII, Nos 1 and 2. *The Economic History Review*.

pioneer among survivors. He is a realist breaking out of the wilderness of exploitation. His neighbours farm by the tradition; he farms by a vocational and religious sense of the earth. They are natives; he is a newcomer. So pioneer and survivors meet in the same region, pursuing the same livelihood with the same end, the one by "taking thought," the others by inheritance.

In the late summer of 1944, I spent a week on my friend's farm. I shall not easily forget my first day there. We started at 5 a.m. in darkness to pick up a train for Taunton 25 miles away, lost our way thrice, caught the train because it was late, drove another 10 miles from Taunton into the heart of one of the remotest countrysides of the West, went out into the barley field, pitched sheaves, took our supper close on midnight and so to bed after a day of 21 hours.

It was at a time the victorious arms of England were battling their way through France against the Satanic power of the absolute State and opening the way for the deeper, the ultimate struggle for England's soul. The times big with the shaping of destiny, the immemorial peace of the farm against the convulsion of the outer world, the sinking back into the country activities of our forefathers and yet the vivid sense of their immense implications for the future, made what followed symbolic.

It was a farm of only 50 acres, situated in the foothills, some said of the Brendons and others of the Quantocks. At any rate, it was in the see-saw region where they impinge and where a flat field is a freak. The farm-buildings cluster where all the farm-fields slide down like a fluted glass to a bottom common to both. Only in the rick-yard, round the midden and in the vegetable garden could one walk on the level. On two sides it was enclosed by an L-shaped orchard of Quarrendons, Morgan Sweets and other cider-apples, the trees planted in a lawny pasture that sloped more gently down to the bartons than the fields about them. The farm, with its piggery, granary, stack-yard, bullock-yard, stable, cider-house, cow-house, sandstone walls, workshop, linhay, gates and cobble paths, fitted itself into the elbow-joint of the terraced orchard. This led to a discovery.

A climb above the shorter arm of the orchard, up a permanent pasture and to the top of a stubble of dredge corn above that disclosed almost the complete range of the Quantocks running

north-west to Quantocks Head and south-east to wooded Cothelstone Hill, while to the south stretched the long dark spinal ridge of the Blackdowns. The gap between them allowed the sight to travel on past the Ilminster and Yeovil region to the pale opalescent heights walling the Vale of Blackmore, sacred to the memory of William Barnes. In the centre of this gap stood the old Hunting Tower or Folly of Combe Florey. The two massifs converged there and the tower was like a boss in a groined roof linking them together. But what was remarkable was that the layout of the farm to the orchard was repeated on the grand scale by that of the solitary tower to the heads of the Quantocks and the Blackdowns. The farm was cupped within this double crook, first in miniature by the two-sided orchard and then by the vast outer ramps of the two convergent ranges, just as a horse-chestnut flower is contained by its calix and spreading coronet of leaves. The orchard was the inner vallum of an earthwork as great as half Somerset.

The farm itself was the home of a new freedom and seemed to draw something of its strength from the great Quantock range. From Cothelstone and Bagborough to the promontory of Will's Neck, a true mountain (over 1000 feet) rearing prow-like over the Crowcombe Woods and along the barer ridge to Hurley Beacon and Bicknoller, it is as clean as a Downland scarp. This was the austerity of freedom. But the Quantocks have a variety of form all their own. The series of points beyond Will's Neck are moulded into low flattened cones, pauses between the long lines sweeping up to and away from them. They were already purpling against the time when the worts ripen among the heather and the bracken rusts among the Cothelstone steepes. They were already drawing on their Tyrian cloak for autumn. This was freedom's richness. Placed as the farm was, all this greatness from horizon to horizon seemed implicit in its littleness.

The large was contained in the small in a more direct and literal manner. The farmstead itself was of Quantock sandstone and the hogsheads of cider had been sawn out of Crowcombe Woods. The silvery slats on one of the farm buildings, as big as the roofing stones of Purbeck and Horsham, were quarried from the ragstone of the Brendons. The steers were long-horned Devons and the cows a shorthorn cross with this same breed, whose bigness of bone and hardy constitution the hill pastures of the whole

wide region had nurtured. The sheep, Dorset Downs crossbred with Devon Long-Wools, are as often as not bought in August from Raleigh's Cross on the Brendons as hoggets¹ for winter fattening from ewes run on the upland pastures and themselves sold in spring to the butchers. A tip-cart in the open shed facing the rick-yard had been made by an Exmoor wheel-wright. Thus the whole vast landscape had contributed in one way and another to the farm in the midst of it.

The holding was a family farm as were most of the others in the neighbourhood, because "Nature's own sweet and cunning hand" had ordained it so to be. It was managed by a brother and sister, an occasional pupil, a labourer waiting for a holding of his own and the services of neighbours, friends and relations at the peak seasons. Since my friend owned it, it may be considered a small yeoman's farm. Such farms, being more or less independent of contractors, cropping programmes from Whitehall, man-hours, time-sheets, machinery, chemicals and "efficiency," in short of the modern economic system, are specifically regional and self-supporting. By the luck of my former writings I had become the friend of this contemporary yeoman who had brought me into what is called a "backward area," an area, that is to say, where, if you refuse to co-operate with nature and start to bully her, you go under.

Here are very few roads. They are nearly all steep and winding lanes boxed in with embanked hedgerows often 12-15 feet high and forming tunnels unless the billhook is active among them and they are well laid in autumn. They are earth-hedges and the varied growth (a lot of it is holly) stands upon 4-6 feet of soil. These lanes, which lead to what the world without would call nowhere, namely to hamlets, villages and farms, the corner-stone of England, are so hedged for an excellent good reason. The region lies on the red marls and sandstones of the Permian. These are light, open and porous but of considerable depth, a kind and pliant soil but of no great body and substance. Consequently, it

¹Elsewhere called "theaves" or "tegs." When ewes they are often called "gimmers." A hogget is a sheep between lambhood and the first shearing.

slides down the steep places (and few are otherwise) in heavy rains and the banks were built to hold it up. My friend carted 50 tons of such soil up the hill again after one such storm. If some of the steeper land could be terraced as in the Alpes Maritimes, its productivity might well be doubled and thousands of tons of soil saved annually. The stone for the retaining walls is at hand and in its interstices could be planted peas, beans, strawberries and other crops. Instead of carrying the soil downhill, the rainfall could thus be controlled to irrigate it.

For the same reason as the farmers make these high hedges, they use the Huxtable one-way plough, a shapely and ingenious implement with two shares and mouldboards one above the other. It turns the sod uphill on the slope and can be quickly up-ended on the headland to throw it up the same way on the return journey. I know of no instance where a tractor has drawn such a plough: the modern absurdity of pulling a plough with nobody to handle the stilt would probably make it impossible. No central government can make arrangements and adjustments like these; nature, or rather Quantock and Brendon nature, is the government. And because nature is a good deal wiser than the most efficient bureaucracy, this is a home for the family farmer. Of such a life as he leads among these tossing foothills self-sufficiency is the structure and neighbourliness the buttress. The forces of an alien and external world may do and have done and will do their utmost to pick this pocket among the protecting hills. But to rob it wholesale would only be to destroy it and convert it into a wilderness.

Here then a pattern of life can be cherished without excessive interference and the remnants of its traditional heritage conserved. The basilisk eye of the greater world only gets glimpses and side-glances at the little farms tucked among these woods and hills and lanes. The nest is hidden among the briers of backwardness and the thorns of remoteness. I could rest from the labour of the stooks or stitches¹ and hear no sound of things alien and hostile. No sound but the rustle of straw, the quacking of ducks, the cheeping of chicks, the plop of windfalls, the crunching of a cart-wheel, the chumbling of piglets. The peace I drew was not only from a clime as soft as down, from wooing airs winnowed by the hills from the Atlantic. It also came from the tranquil

¹ "traves" in Essex, "hiles" in Wiltshire.

round of the farm, the good lives of its household and its friendliness to me, the timelessness of what I heard and saw and the ancientness of Somerset that was not ancient at all except in the sense that it had gone on for a very long time. For to build the rick and milk the cows and harness the shires and pen the sheep and haul the waggon was neither ancient nor modern. It was conditioned by the nature of the soil and the physiography of the region; they were at once its immunity and impunity from a world too busy, too deeply engaged in one desperate crisis after another to notice it, to improve it and reduce it to its own fantastic levels. A design for living was preserved because it had to be for man to live among these hills at all.

Yet signs there were that the outside world had had a finger in the pie. The former tenant of the farm had been so squeezed by the modern debt-system, the legitimate descendant of Cobbett's "the THING," that he had left it semi-derelict. There was plenty of evidence of the shifts and evasions he had been put to to keep his feet on the soil at all. Not a few of the bartons were roofed with corrugated iron; patchings, proppings and improvisations were everywhere. The thatch—this is a country of thatch and Brendon slats more and more usurped by Welsh slates—needed new coats. In places, he had just let go. Many of the drains were blocked. The stable had become a den for parasites with dry-rot in the stall-timbers, the rafters worm-eaten, the racks gaping, walls and cobbled floor pitted with holes for water and urine to seep into and give the horses thrush and grease.

For three years my friend had worked at the restoration of the farm-steadings and the acres surrounding it, and one of my little jobs was to go round and discuss what could be reconditioned and what replaced. He had copious ideas of adding to the stone-walls, agreeably numerous already, of having wrought-iron gates to the garden he had partly constructed from the local blacksmith, of building a gazebo and a loggia and of substituting rounded stone pillars to linhay and cart-shed in the local idiom to replace the makeshift wooden props. A great opportunity had been presented him of combining the best of the old with the best of the new. That best takes some finding. As a modern soldier training infantry to be individuals, not automata, put it to me in commenting on the post-war plans for the Sudan:

“Great schemes for economic development are planned. . . . We are to have cotton spinning mills, ginning factories, sugar and soap factories, so that the good soil and climate for growing things can be made to produce exportable articles in spite of our remote position. The moderns have their knees on the wrong side of their legs. Forwards is really backwards.”

My yeoman friend was painfully finding his way to a restoration of the tradition both in building and cultivation. Not as a modern antiquarian who loves the past for its own sake and as having no meaning for the present and future. He had perceived that the tradition, moulded alike by the natural conditions of the neighbourhood and the experience of man living by good workmanship and enduring principles, was the only workable and satisfying measure by which to work, to build, to farm and to live. If concrete would aid him to that end, then he would use concrete. But not corrugated iron. So with the farm itself. These foothills, sandwiched in between the Quantocks and the Brendons, are pre-eminently a sheep and barley country, as when their wool enriched the mediæval, Tudor and Stuart cloth-towns. So the farmers try to keep sheep because without sheep to feed and consolidate the light land, it will fail to bear any but the poorest crops or to raise any but screws for stock. The farmers have thus for years been torn between keeping sheep for the sake of their land and, since they are now considered “uneconomic,” getting rid of them for the sake of their pockets.

On his 50 acres, my friend kept a score of ewes and up to 40-50 hoggets folded on roots in the winter. Where sheep are part of the canon of good husbandry, barley usually and roots and kale always must go with them. So he grew 9 acres of barley and 10 of roots. As corn follows roots on rotational principle, here was the skeleton of the farm economy. For the same reasons, a cross between the Devon Long-Wool and the Dorset Down in the sheep and between the Shorthorn (for milk) and the long-horned red Devon in the cattle was part of the same canon. It was part of the tradition (with a slight compromise over the milk) and of the directions issued for good farming by this particular land and its particular conformation in this particular place. Accordingly, my friend kept both, half a dozen cows for a small milk yield and the rest Devon steers. Their good health and appearance were

nature's own certificate to him of acting according to her decrees. You can always tell whether or no farm-beasts are living on a soil suited to them and organically fed by an indescribable bloom or lustre upon them.

Pigs too, are "uneconomic." But these Somerset hills and hollows are not ruled by the laws of accountancy and so he kept pigs, a breeding sow with a litter, a gilt for the future and unspecialised porkers and baconers. For baconers on a small farm are simply porkers that continue on the farm a few months longer, with a mixture of barley meal for the lean and softer foods for the fat. The market is secondary, self-maintenance primary in an economy interlocked with the needs and demands of the land. Oats and dredge corn helped to feed them and the rest of the stock, and so he grew 9 acres of them, as he did Cobbett's corn or maize and intended for an early feed to grow rye. Geese, ducks, poultry, 3 horses and a foal completed the tally. If combine-harvesters and other saurians spawned out of the machine-shops had appeared on a land like this, the land would have laughed them out of countenance. To plough out all its permanent pastures would have been to invite the soil to fall downhill; to have run a tractor over the steeper lands would have invited it to overturn.

The very smallness of the farm put a veto on monoculture and persuaded the receptive farmer to mixed grazing, so that all types of herbage were equally grazed down. Here I was seeing sights absent from the thousands of fields I had passed on my long journey—pigs in the stubble, and sheep, cattle, horses, pigs and free-running poultry all consorting together in one field. This packed animal husbandry induced in its turn a psychological reaction: it imparted a warmth and liveliness and diversity to the scene. The animals of a small farm get to know people, and there is a familiar communion between man and beast that is very good for both.

My friend's ambition was to make cheese and many more pounds of butter than he can make now. This would be a further step towards that circulation of farm-produce on the spot and disposal of *surpluses* which are the secret both of a balanced economy and the self-maintenance of a farm in health of soil and stock.

No chemicals and hardly any fertilisers except a little phosphate for the barley were imported for this farm at all. This is

a general rule prevailing on nearly all the farms of the region. Apart from his midden-yard trodden by the cattle in winter and urine-fed by pipes, my friend is attempting to fit compost into the farm economy. The cows are trained to dung a straw-filled groove behind their tails before leaving their milking-stalls, and this is removed to the compost pits. This is pioneer work indeed. It is an astonishing fact, though with a simple explanation, that of every type and manner of man connected with the land, the most ignorant of the principles of organic manuring is the agricultural scientist. Being wholly preoccupied with chemical "manures," to him muck is merely an obstacle to progress.

My friend has also his own cider press in the cider-house and makes his own cider for his own hogsheads. When this practice is followed throughout a neighbourhood, it will be found that the cider tastes differently from farm to farm. For cider as for cheeses locality is the condition of variety, and there is "hedge-cider" in Somerset which, if not taken at a meal, is an invasion. In the rick-yard stood a reed-comber, a simple device of a block of wood on a trestle and studded with five-inch nails to clean the straw for thatching the rick. It was an indication of the dependence of the whole farm upon the principle of self-help. I could have no doubt that this young farmer would well and truly learn the innermost meaning of husbandry the land itself was trying to teach him when I noticed that he had cut the ivy from all the hedgerow trees on the farm.

Self-help, as our nation once knew, breeds dignity and independence as well as hardiness and simplicity. The value of that independence has come sombrely but also richly home to us to-day. On the positive side, the self-help of the Yugoslav refugees at El Shatt in the desert "on the wrong side of the Suez Canal" regenerated them from the demoralisation incident to refugees into a self-respecting community. On the negative side, the damnation of Belsen and Buchenwald was the fruit of absolute power in conjunction with a no less absolute docility. A less familiar attribute of it is what I may call restfulness. This was demonstrated during the harvesting of the barley. Barley is a tricky crop; it likes a non-acid, well-drained soil; it must be cut dead ripe; it needs a hot sun during the maturing process; the soft straw absorbs moisture more readily than the harder straw of oats and wheat, and, if not completely dry, it soon

sweats in stack. The time to cut and carry must be seized with promptitude and despatch, especially if it is, as this was, a good malting sample. If you are a small owner, you must work hard pretty well all day long and all the year round. And if you grow barley, you must work even harder than that.

Yet the business of carrying and ricking the barley on this farm gave an impression of social leisure rather than urgent team-work. The waggons grinding up and down hill from field to rick-yard, from pitching in the one to pitching in the other; the constant intercourse between the two; the very bustle of working against time seemed to hold the rhythm of the long day drifting into evening and of the evening swooning into dusk, of the clouds heaving in full sail over the growing rick, of the little round, red and sweet Quarrendons on the orchard trees stained yet redder from the reddening sun. Every movement was calm and deliberate and so bestowed grace and measure upon the mover and a something statuesque upon the human figure. The very size of the rick (and these West Somerset ricks are very large, one I heard of being 14 yards by 6 and 25 feet high, though on the Brendons they build little round ricks) in its retaining wall on two sides seemed to contribute to the magnanimous breadth and stability of the whole scene, caught up into the long processional roll of the seasons. The rustle of straw now blended with the crackling of flames, as the great fire in the open chimney piece threw shadows over the room; earth had drawn another breath; man in unison with her had gathered in her goodness.

III

The constellation of small self-contained farms studded between Taunton and Minehead is a nurse of strong local patriotism. But another quality comes into play. That is neighbourliness. While the stack was building, there was Rowley Selway, a family farmer of 21 acres, climbing the ladder and fitting in the sheaves. Next day, my friend and his man, Jimmy, were away carrying Yeoman Baker's barley, and this interchange of voluntary labour occurs at the peak periods throughout the year and throughout the region. Such reciprocity of service fosters, of course, a vigorous sense of community inherited both from the

yeoman and the peasant traditions. It illustrates the true service a tractor can perform: of all crops barley takes most harm from rain and, borrowing Yeoman Baker's machine, my friend was able to expedite his carrying.

The beauty of this neighbourly intercourse is that it is free of the gang and mobile labour-system of the big mechanised farms and of external organisation. To lend a helping hand is at the opposite pole to "the planned economy" of the totalitarian State. Here are no troops of unskilled labour "rushed" hither and thither for harvest and potato-lifting. This community of small farms is a home of freedom. Not freedom from manual labour, but the traditional freedom of a man's home being his castle. The family farmer is the last man on earth, again, to dream of trying to "save" labour or "man-hours." His sole aims are quality of labour first and quantity second, while regulations and restrictions of hours mean nothing to a cluster of farms tended and cultivated by a whole family. And he is the last man not to know his own business, for, as Captain Liddell Hart has written in *Why Don't We Learn From History?*—"Freedom is the foundation of efficiency." The family farm also acts as a check upon that fatalistic drift from the land which during the war has left the urban millions to be supported by 6 per cent of the population. Consequently, a backward and rural area of family farms is less empty and less lonely than elsewhere, and the social and neighbourly sense much more highly developed.

One of my most cherished experiences was to enjoy this sense of an organic community at first hand. We used to set out on a high spring cart, and is there except on horseback a more perfect way of becoming familiar with a particular countryside and its native people? Thirty years ago I was travelling this same country in a carrier horse-bus; thirty years later I found myself in a spring cart. I felt that only in Somerset would this have been possible. I noticed that not once did we encounter a fellow being without greetings, news, inquiries and other interchanges. I was introduced to a kind of culture of communications. In this slow passage out and about this small world, I began to see that the phrase, the brotherhood of man, was not without meaning. The natural friendliness of the Somerset folk, whose voices are usually as caressing as their climate, this, together with common interests in the land, helped to establish good relations. Cotswold

vernacular is the most graphic, Devon and Somerset the warmest in England. But I am certain that by far the greatest force in nourishing this neighbourliness was the diffusion of small family properties or inherited tenancies. Through it I came to know more good people in a week than I could have done in a year among the solitudes of the modern *latifundia*.

A gallery moves across my mind as I recollect these jogging jaunts among the high narrow lanes of Somerset. On one such we passed a triple-arched marl- or lime-kiln recessed into the steep hillside, derelict maybe for donkeys' years. There we met Mr. Welsh, the blacksmith, and the donkeys became more than metaphorical. He told us that, after these kilns became disused, the practice of locally liming the fields was still continued by waggons trundling off to Watchett, the old woad-town, and being loaded by donkeys with panniers fetching lime at low tide from the cliffs. The lime was then mixed with farmyard manure—a practice recommended in composting by the new science that will one day supplant the orthodox one—before spreading on the fields.

Mr. Welsh was an easy and vivacious man, and his elegiac memories were poured out with a sprightliness worthy of happier things. He named blacksmith after blacksmith, gone from here, from there, from yonder. His own son, after assisting him at the forge for 8½ years, he too had left the country workshop for a jam factory. These family farmers still use horses, but what is the point of a shoeless horse?

Another journey was to the wheel-wright, Sid Poole, in the village a mile away. This man illustrates what happens to a closely knit rural community when its life-lines are partly cut by invasion from without. I say partly, because this community is remote enough and its integration is bedded so deep in time as to have resisted the almost total paralysis and discontinuity of other rural areas. What has happened is that the wheel-wright here has not been driven out altogether. But he has been compelled to shift his vocational craft over to house-repairing, plumbing and carpentering jobs. He can only earn his living by deserting the livelihood for which he is supremely equipped.

I was fortunate enough to catch him at a moment when the breakdown of the system of tearing England up from her roots had of necessity forced a replanting. The increase of corn-growing

to save us from starvation had switched Sid Poole back again to waggon-making, not as a normal full-time occupation which satisfied the whole of his being but as a sideline now and again. There was the new waggon just built, painted red and blue and lettered. The undercarriage had been adapted from an old one and he told me that, much as he had enjoyed it, it had not been like making a *new* waggon. That to him would have been the consummate fulfilment. For this tall, lean, spare, neat, brisk, keen-eyed man, whose age was only in his white hair and expressive well-chiselled face, glowed with ardour for his work. He was a master-craftsman every inch of him. He really lived for making waggons and with a selflessness in which the work was all. Thus he told me far more about what his assistant and his apprentice had done than he himself. I got the measure of his own workmanship less by what he did say about it than by what he did not.

The planing, bolting, chamfering, and part-painting of the waggon had been done under his direction by an evacuee he had had for three years. Having no children of his own, he was bursting with pride in him. By parental pressure, this most promising boy will go back to London after the war. Another of the numberless minor tragedies of our countryside. How golden the chance here of rectifying the ancient wrong done to it! How clear the way of making the wheel-wright a happy man and the boy an artist in serving its needs! What a start towards repeopleing its solitudes and restoring interest, skill and pleasure to man's daily work!

Before the boy had entered the family workshop, Sid Poole had had an apprentice of whom he was equally proud. When the war came, he was called up and went into the R.A.F as a carpenter. He acquitted himself so well that he passed his certificate with flying colours—in all but the theoretic side. He applied to his old master who supplied him with the right books to carry him through. But what will be the post-war prospects in wheel-wrighting for his old apprentice to rejoin him? It is trivial and casual incidents like these that light up the words of Jefferson in letters of fire: "I view great cities as pestilential to the morals, the health and the liberties of man."

Sid Poole uses a band-saw and so presented me with one more example of the utility of the small machine to the master-crafts-

man. He maintained that it not only freed him to devote more time to the artistry of his hand-work but cut out the shapes of the felloes more accurately than by hand. A man who so loved the properties, humours and qualities of woods and had educated himself to follow the grain of the organic life could never be in any danger of being dominated by automatism. It is the skill-less proletarian that becomes a slave to the machine. Sid's white hair, his aloneness, the obsolescence of his craft, had not been able to subdue his boyish enthusiasm for its mysteries. He was a straggler from the files of the woodmasters, surviving in a period that gazes with wonder at the great hammer-beam roof with angel corbels all of Spanish chestnut in the refectory of Cleeve Abbey a few miles away, but denies to contemporary man the means of moulding into new forms and services the great tradition in the working of wood. To give this man and his like an apprentice and economic security by some modern version of the Statute of Artificers of 1563 would solve more than "the problem of unemployment." It would help to solve the problem of creation.

IV

Men like Welsh and Sid Poole, were of course, the sinews of an agricultural community, and their numbers and variety tended to be the greater in one of small farmers. These secluded foothills between two massive ranges were still fostering the descendants of England's former peasants and yeomen. Of the former I came to know three, two personally and one by hearsay because he was always too busy for closer observation. This man, Mr. Meade, has acquired the outlying 75 acres of the farm where I was a guest, the pre-war depression having forced many farmers to let go the lands furthest from the farmhouse from sheer lack of labour, means and heart to cultivate them.

These 75 acres he worked with his wife and one land-girl, and his labours, both superhuman and inhuman, upon them were acquiring throughout this upland valley the stature of a myth. He works over them day after day, year after year, in rags, and, when darkness drives him indoors, turns cobbler for the household boots or finds other ploys to save himself from rest. Not a yard of his acreage is neglected. He grows wheat, barley, oats, kale,

mangolds and turnips; he milks 11 cows and takes 35 gallons a day, carting their manure on to his fields; he keeps 50-60 hoggets for fertilizing his land and fattening in autumn on the roots, stubbles and pastures and sells them in March.

“Full fifty comely sheep I raised
As sweet a flock as ere I grazed!
Upon the mountains did they feed,
They throve and we at times did thrive . . .”

With his land-girl he has been known to plant 12,000 cabbages by hand with a “biscay” or hand mattock in five days with intervals only for milking. In a country that does not favour either wheat-growing or milk-production, his labours are redoubled. He has been seen to do the haymaking himself alone, first pitching and then jumping on the cart to load. In six years he has doubled the yields of his farm and made its soils twice as fertile as they were.

All the neighbours recognised that he had delivered himself into bondage. He had sacrificed leisure, social intercourse and his very life itself to the devouring love of his farm. Yet my heart beat a little faster at the news of him. Where does one draw the line between heroism and fanaticism and at what point does virtue become vicious? And when our perversities are the very reverse of Mr. Meade’s and we shy at hard manual work like a horse at a ghost, when to stoop and pore and brood over the land in this Zolaesque fashion is a contempt in all men’s mouths, how could I not but contradict recoil with admiration? Whatever the excesses of his Puritanic zeal, he did at least throw a blaze of light on the modern movement to take the land away from men of whose ardours and endurances in land-devotion he is the extravagant representative.

Mr. Rowe I did meet from the spring cart. He was of profound interest to me because he was the genuine peasant, and the genuine peasant is of exceeding rarity to-day. Mr. Rowe rented 4½ acres not only of poorish land but so steep that with only one natural leg to my anatomy I could not climb it without his aid. Both as a person and a farmer he was a little man whose diabetes could not sour his serenity nor crust over his good nature. Still less had his littleness and his sickness prevented him from writing an

epic over his diminutive plot. Let the facts speak for themselves; let them now praise this obscure hero of an achievement fit for fable.

Of his 4½ acres only a few roods are on the flat and on these he grows early and maincrop potatoes. On the summit, a tiny leaning plateau on which his cottage stands, strawberries, from which he took 120 lbs. in 1944, and flowers for his bees take most of the ground. The only other spaces where a man does not have to dig his toes in the ground are a few yards between the potato-patch and the foot of the slope. These he had filled up by a haystack whose grass he had collected from the margins of the lanes and a terrace half-way up on which he had built his piggery and his fowl-houses, together with a stack of faggots from his hedge-cutting. He grows a greater diversity of roots and tops for his livestock and for sale on his 4 acres than does many a grower with 400 acres of fat and level land. To save room, he had built his boiler for cooking the pig-swill under a bank and trained his marrows to climb up the wall and along the roof of a lean-to.

The capacity of his little fields of mangolds, kale, cabbages, onions and the rest he had supplemented by planting some with a trowel in the hedge-bank where they grew robustly. He was an orchardist too, lining the rim of the terrace with fruit-trees, plums, a peach for his wife and Tom Putt and Blenheim apples grafted by himself on wild crab stock. And on this tilted plot of land, like a pocket handkerchief hung on a line, he had enough grass and fodder and grew enough flowers, quite apart from his sales and household uses, to keep within the area a pony, 130 fowl, including 30 pullets, goats, 6 ewes and a lamb, a breeding sow with a litter of 8 (he told me he had had 40 pigs on it) and 30 hives of bees. What is more, his crops, as I could see for myself, were of superlative quality and his animals (except for a ewe with rupture) in perfect health. The only labour for the cultivation of this chess-board, the beekeeping and the care of the animals is his own and his wife's. His own is divided between his plot and casual labour for neighbouring farmers, including hedge-laying, his wife's between it and cooking and housekeeping. And he a diabetic!

Yet when I told this mighty landsman (and I was moved by what I saw) that he was a credit to his country, he went shy with wonder at my praise and blushed with gratification. But I told

him only the half of what I felt. He is the tenant of an estate, but if I had been the landowner, I would have paid him to stay on it. For a landowner to have had the privilege of a peasant like this on his land should have been of more account to him than a famous picture or monument, than a precious heirloom or museum piece. Pilgrimages should be made to visit his farmlet; he should be listed in the memorable attractions of his country. But he should be regarded as more than one of the worthies of Somerset. His place is as a national figure, to teach a heedless generation stuffed with illusions and false values what can be done with four acres of poor and difficult land by a man who has never heard of the soil-analyst, who can snap his fingers at the chemical combine, who is independent of the machine-shops of the whole world and, when the crazy edifice of super-industrialism, international trade and the exploitation of natural resources comes tumbling down, will be the kind of husbandman to save old England from starvation and feed a hundred million people.¹

The first shall be last and the last first, and a day will come when we shall look to one who is the most despised and has been the most persecuted of all the children of England—the English peasant. That it should ever have entered the heads of modern busybodies to dispossess such men as these and absorb their plots into larger units on the ground that they are “uneconomic” is a measure of that peculiar lunacy afflicting nations that put the factory before the farm. Or, as Mr. F. Sykes of Wiltshire in *This Farming Business*, 1944, has put it:

“Small farmers . . . would be better employed as helpmen on larger farms under farmers with business ability and a greater knowledge of farming as a science. They would be happier thus freed from the anxieties of farming on their own account, and would earn just as much money as they did in a normal year. . . . Their wives too would be spared the drudgery of rearing a family, keeping the home going, and doing part-time work on the farm as well.”

¹ Mr. Rowe is not unique. At the beginning of this year, I had a letter from a small-holder of Perranporth in Cornwall, a woman, 57 years of age and a cripple. On 20 poles of sandy soil she raised unaided in 1944 210 lbs. of honey, 143 lbs. of soft fruit, 56 lbs. of early potatoes, 5 cwt. of main crop potatoes, 700 eggs, 18 gallons of mead and elderberry wine, 4 lbs. of spun wool, 4 goats, 13 cockerels, 3 pullets, more than 30 hens and enough vegetables to make £9 at a Red Cross sale.

Another indomitable son of the Somerset soil is Rowley Selway, who rents 21 acres of fields much scattered and even more uppish and downish than most in Quantockshire. He too comes of peasant stock among the small farmers and basket-makers of Alfred's Isle of Athelney at the junction of the Tone and the Parrett over the Quantocks to the east, some of the flattest land on earth. He rents it because his dearest wish, to own it like the traditional peasant, has not been vouchsafed him. In all but the fact of ownership he is the characteristic peasant, and I saw a good deal more of him than I had the chance of seeing Mr. Rowe, since he dined with us at the farm where I was and was often about it. Rowley, as everybody called him, is built on very lean and long lines, and the length and acuteness of his embrowned face are such as you often see in grooms. At first sight he looks far too fragile (in contrast with the comfortable curves of his smiling and extremely competent wife) to endure a tenth part of his arduous life. But when he moves, his muscular flexibility is like a leopard's; he is "a pard-like creature, beautiful and swift," and with all its shrewdness his is a honeyed nature. It is impossible to imagine Rowley upset about anything and yet he is full of sensibility. And he has a hard and bitterly strenuous life.

His father was rather a trial, his consumption of cider having been twelve hogsheds a year, one a month with regularity but with disorderly consequences. I gathered that Rowley's equanimity was the mainstay of the household. On the flat lands of the basket-makers where Alfred once hid in reeds, he inherited a 50-acre holding after a boyhood not dissimilar from Cobbett's, having been a three-horse ploughboy at North Rivel, where teazels were grown for the cloth-mills. When the first Great War burst, he was taken from it and an employee from a gas company at Birmingham was put in charge of it. Consequently, he had no alternative but to sell up when he returned from the battles. He migrated to these warm tumultuous slopes of Quantock and became a roadman on contract with his pony and 21 acres. When the roadmen, who in those days enjoyed considerable freedom and latitude in their individual responsibility for certain sections of the road, came under the County Council, he had to work under council officers from 7.30 to 5. This by no means suited with cultivating his holding. Being a true peasant, he threw over the road and bound his life to his fields. He thus belonged to a totally

different school of life from that of the wage-earning labourer who feels more secure working on another man's farm than venturing the toils and risks (in these days) of cultivating his own. He still retains his old habit of collecting dead leaves for his manure heap and muck cart, what time he can squeeze in from ploughing, sowing and reaping, and tending his 7 cows (now 5), ducks and pig.

During the Great Depression, when England once more deserted her countryside for the charms of usury, he was getting fourteen pounds for an incalf heifer, one pound for a fattened lamb, sixpence for a dozen eggs, elevenpence for a pound of butter and half a crown for a weaner. By a miracle of doggedness and tenacity and with the cheerful aid of the best of wives, he hung on and never failed to pay his rent. On the family farm the wife is nearly always her husband's partner, a condition making for a perfect equality between the sexes and the firmest stability in the home. When the yet bigger war came, Rowley had to produce both milk and wheat on a handful of acres not suitable for either, and to break more fields than left him feed for his cows. His son Harry too had to go into the army, so that he had no help, none whatever, outside his own strong arm, dauntless character and shrewd brain to cultivate a tiny difficult holding on which his family wholly subsisted. All manner of men will take a certain pleasure in recollecting tales of hardship and struggle near the bone of endurance, so long as such reminiscences are comfortably ensconced in the past. But Rowley had never known anything else but extremity; not for him to sit back at his ease and muse aloud upon

"Old unhappy far off things
And battles long ago."

The point about him was the continuity of his sea of troubles; *his* past stalked obstinately into his present.

On his holding he grows kale, swedes, turnips, a three-years ley, wheat, barley, maize and oats and for his ploughing has no complicated outfit sent round by the War Agricultural Committee. He has only his pony. But he also has an allotment of an acre and a quarter for keeping the household in fresh vegetables and spent many long hours every week up at the Observer Post

in uniform. He might therefore be expected to take some interest in modern discussions on the Leisure State. But if you were to offer Rowley the prospect of several hours a day doing nothing, he would regard it as equivalent to going to prison.

So Rowley has always lived and worked under an economic cloud and a harder, more anxious, life there could not have been. Yet a happier, more charitable, gentle, serene and honest countryman is not to be found over all the broad acres of England. His long sharp face, mahogany brown as an autumn hawk, is a portrait of content, and, as he talked beside us sitting round the open hearth of blazing logs (what an old Cotswolder once called to me a "blizzy") boiling the copper kettle on its ratchet hook, of energy in repose. They say that the art of conversation is no more. But they have not heard Rowley describing his own art of ploughing with a three-horse plough, leader, thiller and trace-horse, in that heavy wheat-and-bean land of his forefathers, driving so straight a furrow that a rabbit could be seen along it from one end to the other. Of how he set his plough thrice and how the horses learned to turn at the headland, of cutting out, gathering up and casting off, here was the talk of a master. This was "farmering" at its most vocational and expert pitch, as remote from the modern slap-and-dash ploughing with a tractor as this benign countryside from the fret of cities.

Rowley's discourse flowed on in the tuneable soft voice of the men of Somerset from what we call in my part of the country "plushing" the embanked high double hedges of the Quantock area to irrigating the osier-beds of the Isle of Athelney and building stone-slatted roofs of that Brendon stone which time and weather mature into the silvery old age of Kentish oak. He was as professional about cider-making as about ploughing, and the proper apples of the West Country for that traditional craft, Kingston Black first and foremost, Liver Black, Redcap and Hang-down. His wife knew as much as he did about cider-making, immortalised in *The Woodlanders* where Giles Winterbourne ("Autumn's very brother") travels with his portable mill from farm to farm. But her father's mill was of the kind that stays put, and it took four men to turn the handle of the granite crusher to make a cheese for the press.

Such men as Rowley Selway are the very anchorage of the nation to hold it from sinking under the tidal wave of money and

machines. When I think of him, I am reminded of Rauschnig's words in *The Revolution of Destruction*: "Deliverance lies in the forces of true conservatism and in the healing restoration of the spiritual and social forces of the historic past." When I think of the peasant society Rowley represents, I am reminded of a letter I received from an English major on the Italian front:

"As far as the eye can see there are olives, now laden with their black fruit, nearly ripe enough to pick. Between the olives stand the vines on their posts, now brown, cut back and tied, in readiness for next year's grape harvest. Below the wheat is already sprouting, making the third crop in this immensely fertile soil. There is plenty of labour and it is a common sight to see 7 women bending over the ground in a line, breaking the sod or thinning roots. Although the Germans have killed 80 per cent of their stock, there is still much manure from the remaining 'bove' and this is used carefully and economically—for here they have no superphosphates or limes and rely entirely on natural manures and the *working* of the land. There is something very heartening about a large white ox ploughing very slowly, walking at a pace that *will* not be increased. . . . I think that . . . the Italian works harder than farmers in most parts of England; at any rate he couldn't do more work. The way in which they terrace the slopes and build walls is a lesson for any one and required much labour and technique. . . . On me . . . this fecundity of the soil and production, which Italians get without the aid of 'modern' implements, has had a very profound impression. I realise that it is not merely the fertility that produces these results. It is the adequate supply of labour and the practice of a really economical husbandry."

This hillock-and-dingle country, bastioned by the great ranges of the Quantocks and the Brendons, is, I speak generally, cultivated by four types. They are peasant farmers who more often rent their own little farms for lack of the capital to buy them,

yeomen who own from a hundred acres upwards, tenant farmers of larger farms, much fewer than in the adjoining county of Wiltshire, and labourers who nearly all have gardens and pigs. These last are also independent casuals who take a job here and a job there, threshing, harvesting, hedge-laying and in the winter making spars for thatching. The younger men still love the land as a way of life. But they are more and more inclined to think and act in terms of cash returns and have less independence of spirit than their fathers to stand up to the bureaucrats. They have seen them struggling against the tide of the times to no purpose, and it has sapped their powers of resistance to such bodies as the W.A.E.C.s whose coercion their fathers still will not hesitate to combat when they know their own ways are the right ones. This was not, however, true of Jimmy, my friend's man, who had received a methodical training on Scottish farms. He was deeply interested in soil-erosion and a disciple of Sir Albert Haward. This frank, thoughtful, sturdy and well-looking young man was in process of discarding a few Socialist tags and catch-words still sticking to him, like burrs on a tweed coat. For what he wanted above all things in the world was not a totalitarian Utopia of the mass-man but a holding of his own.

Thus, all the different types of landmen are to be regarded in ratio to their preservation or slow secession from the weakening tradition of Somerset husbandry. In the Vale of Taunton Deane, where the larger tenant farmer prevails, for instance, a crippling blow has been struck at this local husbandry by the disuse of cheese-making. I visited a large farm there at the foot of Cothelstone Hill, rich in spacious stone bartons, which was peremptorily stopped by the Government in 1942 from making Cheddar cheeses renowned over all Somerset. Somerset was compelled to eat Canadian cheddar (which even mice disdain) or nothing. To reveal just how important the local cheese-making was to craftsmanship, prosperity and the quality of English food, I give Mrs. Tucker's (of Yarford Farm, Kingston) recipe for it in the words she gave it to me:

"Cheddar is the mother of hard pressed cheeses. It belongs to the hard pressed varieties and can be made on a long keeping principle. It is made from whole new milk—mornings and evenings mixed.

W.O.F.

K

Treatment of milk in hot weather

"Due to prevailing temperatures it is necessary to cool the milk, otherwise too much acidity due to the terms present in the milk would develop. In dealing with small quantities frequent stirring does much to lower the temperature. But with a larger amount it is a good plan to pour the milk into several vessels and surround them with water. Next morning the evening's milk should be heated to 70 degrees F. and the Starter added at the rate of $\frac{1}{2}$ a teacupful to 6 gallons of milk $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 hours before renneting, as you heat the milk to 70 gently stir in the cream. When the morning's milk comes in, strain into tub with night's milk. Now heat to 84 degrees F. and add the rennet at the rate of 1 teaspoonful to 3 gallons of milk, dilute it with 3 or 4 times the amount of water. Stir in by means of ladle for 5 minutes, then top stir to prevent cream from rising until the rennet shows effect; which can be seen by the bubbles remaining on the surface, also the feel of the milk and if, on dropping a little cold water on the surface, a clear mark can be seen. This is usually in about 12 to 20 minutes from adding the rennet. In about 45 to 50 minutes from the time the rennet is added, the curd should be ready to cut. You should be able to put your hand on the surface and find it quite free from fat and break over the finger with a clean fracture. Now commence the cutting. This takes from 12 to 20 minutes. Cut in very fine strips. *Lengthways, Across and Diagonally* twice. *Lengthways and Across* again.

"Stir up by hand from bottom of tub to break up large pieces, lift and so make cutting even. The curd should now be the size of the press. Scalding should now be commenced. It should be done gradually at the rate of one degree in 3 minutes, until it reaches 92 to 94 F. If done too quickly the outside of the curd becomes cooked and the inside will be raw.

"The cooking usually takes about 45 minutes. At this time the curd should feel firm and when pressed in the hand should be springy and shotty. If these conditions are not met with, stirring should be done for longer.

"Stir well all over the tub and allow to pitch. Take a piece of curd and dry it in your hand and test it on a hot iron. If it will catch hairs on the iron leave in whey for 20 minutes; if it does not pull, leave 30 minutes. At the end of 10 minutes

push curd slowly and carefully to one end of tub, getting it in a compact mass, put on a muslin over top, then rack and weight.

"At the end of time stated withdraw the whey, put a muslin over top to prevent a loss of curd. Cut into blocks according to amount of milk that is being dealt with, put on rack, and turn every $\frac{1}{2}$ hour to assist drainage until it will pull with $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in fine hairs on the hot iron.

"This being the case break up curd in inch squares and add salt at the rate of 1 oz. to 3 lbs. curd (1 lb. curd from 1 gallon of milk), thoroughly mix and put into mould lined with muslin, press well down and put to press (not too much weight at first), turn next morning and cap the top with muslin, remove again in the evening to cap the bottom and bandage. The next morning the cheese should be finished. Put on an outer bandage and date it. It should be kept in a cool place and should be ready for use in ten weeks or longer—turn every day."

On one drive in the spring cart, I passed a farm which had been literally killed dead by Death Duties. The farmer had worked it tirelessly for five years and then surrendered, the landlord having been brought so low by this vicious system as to be unable to lift a finger to help him. I saw the scrub and bracken (this was in war-time) creeping over what a short time ago had been a lush clover ley.

On the other hand, Masters Badcock and Baker, the one the principal tenant of the region, the other the principal yeoman, manfully maintained the tradition and so the fertility and fruitfulness of their acres. I did not meet Mr. Badcock personally, but I saw his farm (perhaps 400 acres) from the hillside and passed through it. Both near and far it was impressive and beautiful to look upon. He is reputed to be one of the very best farmers in Somerset and appearances did not belie so proud a title. The buildings look like a compact village rather than a farm, surrounded by upward flowing lands abundant in crops, flocks and herds.

The close-laid hedges, the neat cottages with their glowing front gardens, the massive stone barns, the linhays with their rounded stone pillars, the generous yards with their rows of well-thatched ricks, the order, the seemliness and the spaciousness of the whole took the mind back to that era of large prosperity

before the long series of crashes from '79 onwards. There are workers on this farm that have never travelled further than Taunton and Bridgwater. The labourers and their sons have so old-fashioned a loyalty to the House of Badcock which has farmed these acres for generations that they would not leave them for £10 a week. Though the present Badcock has tractor-power, horses are still the dominant one and he employs the carter of the old once familiar type who cared first for his horses, then for his master and lastly for himself. The dung-cart is still the warden of the farm's fertility. The whole complex was a spectacle that would have swelled the heart of Cobbett. He saw farms very like this one in his rides down the Valley of the Avon.

Mr. Baker I did meet over a quart of the admirable cider he still makes from his own mill. He differs from what I could learn about Badcock in just the way that the yeoman does from the tenant farmer. The yeoman put his land and his family before his men and of the two the tenant farmer was the best employer. That does not always follow, as Sir Thomas Overbury showed when he described the yeoman as saying to his men not "go" but "let us go." But it was not so here. Yeoman Baker owns about 140 acres (20 more than the traditional yeoman's hide). Though the expedience of war-farming virtually compelled him to buy a tractor, he uses it in strict subordination to his ploughing horses. The self-binder has always been hard on horses and for saving them he welcomed the tractor, as also for very stiff land. But he would never have bought one but for the war, the good reason being that he feared its power to break the pattern of Somerset husbandry.

He cares little for milk except for the household and for his long-horned Devons to rear their own calves: sheep, ewes and hoggetts, stores and fattened cattle are the mainstay of his husbandry. So far as is possible for him nowadays, he adheres to the long-established rotations and makes his farm self-supporting by the fruitful and seasonal round of the dung-cart. The only inorganic and imported stuff he uses is basic slag, as a means for releasing plant foods, subsoiling, its only alternative, being inapplicable to this open soil which does not form a hard pan. He has been forced, of course, to plough up more than the economy of his farm will stand for. But any further encroachments upon it by officials without are met by such severity of

determination that he has been left, an extraordinary phenomenon in these days, almost the master of his own house and fields.

Mr. Baker, in fact, is a survival from a period when the yeoman was the tie-beam of England. He is rugged with a thickset powerful body like a tree-trunk and legs like the roots of a tree growing on a bank, his nose slightly hooked, his weather-beaten features broadly defined like a contour map. The mellow tone of his Somerset speech issues from his rock-like face like a limpid stream from the mountain-side. And a rock he is, a living block of local sandstone, holding his acres together by sheer force of character against the erosion of modernism. He carried them through the depression on his broad back at a time when, as he told me himself, farming land in some places was going for half a crown an acre, with briars growing across the windows of the farmhouses. Through it and through the war-years of blackcoat farming, he has sheeped them and mucked them, and not all the powers have stopped him from so doing according to the rule of Somerset husbandry. He is the farmer whose "foot fats the land," the "Maister," as his wife still calls him, hewn out of his native stone and steeped, even pickled, in his native tradition. He has in him too a strain of that stern Puritanism, congenial to all individualists, that swept the West Country.

He expressed his robust and clear-sighted views on politics and economics with almost biblical force. He was certain that the export policy of international trade was foredoomed to failure. To hold land, he declared, no matter how dead-weighted by financial juggling, was going to be the best insurance against the collapse of a jerry-built world whose plans had been drawn at Bretton Woods.

But he had a higher wisdom than speculating on the stormy political weather to come. He saw with true insight that industrialism had substituted a false for an authentic wealth which lay in our native land and the good Englanders it bore. And with something of prophetic fire he foretold that we should pay to the uttermost farthing for having betrayed and ruined the kindest wife a man could have, our motherland. He felt the flimsiness of the industrial superstructure we had built on the razed foundations of the traditional England, and he had a contempt for the dealer's and jobber's civilisation we had erected in its stead. He believed with fervour in the mediæval "just price" and that a

farmer should, so far as possible, avoid the markets and base the whole of his politics upon its restoration. A self-supporting England was his farming and indeed his moral creed, and in his integrity, his force of character and the way he farmed his acres he lived his faith. Yet even he had been affected by the disintegration of the tradition, less ruinous in Somerset than elsewhere but even here sapping and undermining the whole structure of a stable husbandry. In repairing some of his buildings he had used corrugated iron, and I did not dare to ask him whether he hated it.

Yeoman Baker has two sons and a daughter who by the happy dispensation of the family farm worked with him upon it. His wife still looks after the chickens and the ducks of which I seemed to see hundreds. Laundresses are unknown in the Quantocks and she does her own washing. Both sons, who were eager to stay on, regretted the demise of cheese-making on the farm in the days of their grandfather and that bureaucracy had forced them to give up making the 60 lbs. of butter every week that was sold locally before the war. In one of the cart-sheds was a small Blackstone Mill whose power was run off the tractor. It took hardly more than a square yard of space and was less than five feet high. It ground on its miniature stones a meal for the cattle as fine as face powder. One of the sons told me how anxious he was to grind the farm wheat on it for baking the flour into whole-grain bread. Here was "politics" of more value than all the ideologies rampant in our world. He took pride in the cider-mill and press that still make the farm cider. I could be sure he was of the right stuff when he spoke of the mistake of putting up the cheese of the cider with oat- instead of wheat-straw in the previous year. The family poured away 3 hogsheds rather than drink it.

Young men like these could be trusted not to be corrupted by automatism; they knew how to fit the tractor into the economy of the farm, what it could do and what it could not. The craftsman's workshop and the family farm know precisely both how to use machinery and how to avoid being used by it. They are the only institutions that do so know.

In a small pocket-book I carry about with me, I jotted the following: "Bert sees it all." I am inclined to think that such brevity could not be bettered for potting the philosophy of Bert

Bozley, the taximan who took us to Cleeve Abbey one way and over the Quantocks another.

This round-faced son of Somerset in his confident manner, easy manners, caustic wit, flow and readiness of tongue, good company and crisp commentaries on men and things was remarkably like a Cockney. A Cockney is essentially a provincial; he belongs to his own place, to the old England of regional differentiation and vernacular speech. For eighteenth century London was not only the centre of wit and fashion, literature and law, government and commercial greed, gin and Puritanism. It was a magnet of the most superior native craftsmanship. Here was the ancestry of the Cockney. But Bert differed from the Cockney in possessing a wider vision than he, cut off from nature and the fundamentals, has the chance of developing. In acuteness of observation, there was not much to choose between Bert and the best type of Cockney. But the latter necessarily throws upon the screen of communication a series of close-ups; he lacks the depth, the perspective and the synthetic grasp of the best type of countryman.

Bert's eyes were like Cobbett's in this sense, that they penetrated. He possessed a first-rate topographical knowledge of his own countryside but, like Cobbett, he related it organically to the life and work of the countryman. He loved this particular country with its strange blending of softness and majesty. But his view of it was not at all from the dehumanised angle of the "picturesque." He loved the country as the home and workshop of the countryman. Its beauty in his eyes was never isolated from its utility. And so the touches of poetry in his talk were incidental; his admiration was never a set piece. We passed a young pigeon on a wall that did not fly away. "It's not yet waywise," said Bert. A folk-song in a word.

Before he took his taxi, he had been a farm-labourer and he was the son of a blacksmith. This helped to give wholeness to his ideas in describing the scenes we passed. His views on automatism were exactly the same as those of the few who have come through on the other side of it. Take six acres, he said. If they are run as they should be, they give employment to one man and two horses and jobs to carpenter, smith, farrier, wheel-wright and saddler. The machine comes along and disrupts the whole commonwealth. It saves men and hours when our object should be to use and to spend them. Men are made, he went on, by the

interest they feel in and the skill they exercise upon their work. If a man makes his living out of, say, war-bonds or clerking or turning screws at the assembly line, his only real interest is confined to the four walls of where he lives, and that's the end. On his job he only thinks of what he can get out of it, and so money usurps all the proper and primary preoccupations of man. If he has land or a craft, money must come second and that is the secret of happiness.

Bert's own craft had become driving people about the region of Somerset where he lives. Accordingly, he had accumulated an astonishing wealth of information about it. Not guide-book information but observations on the various aspects of the relations between land and people. Through this, he had evolved a philosophy of his own which, roughly speaking, came to this. Man succeeds according to his understanding of and conformity to natural principles. If the reverse, he fails. He distinguished clearly between the organic and the automatic views of life, between exploiting and utilising natural processes. And so in his own concrete spontaneous purely observational unhistoric and unsystematised way, he had formulated a concept all his own of something he had never heard of—the Natural Law. It was by this canon that he judged not only people but places. If the place we passed was looked after by somebody who in his own way was obedient to the Natural Law, it had Bert's approval, whether owned by a squire or rented by a squatter.

I saw enough of this handful of Somerset folk to feel along the heart a touch of the ancient country virtue of England, consorting so happily with Somerset's own ancient bloom and innocence. The word, virtue, narrowed by Victorians to mean little more than prudishness and used once by Shakespeare in the niggardly sense of—"Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale"—once included the cakes and ale as part of the complex of work and play. It is, I think, the right title for Perdita, the fresh living bloom of that old England. Now it is all work and no play for the countryman, what is left of him. On my return, I saw its reverse in whatever sense the word be taken, severe or generous. A party of ex-country but now factory girls, boarded the train near Didcot, one of our post-Cobbett wens. They were Cressida after she had left Troy for the Grecian camp:

“Set them down
For sluttish spoils of opportunity
And daughters of the game.”

They had lost not only their “virtue” but that rural fragrance that had once enchanted it: “Lechery, lechery; still, wars and lechery; nothing else holds fashion.” Thersites had the last word.

From what I saw, Somerset is still one of the centres of resistance against the forces of industrialism which, represented in all their naked fury by modern Germany, are destroying the world.

CHAPTER VIII

POMONA FARM

"The wine they want in Paradise
They find in Plodder's End,
The apple wine of Hereford,
Of Hafod Hill and Hereford,
And there I had a friend.

"The soft feet of the blessed go
In the soft western vales,
The road the silent saints accord,
The road from heaven to Hereford,
Where the apple wood of Hereford
Goes all the way to Wales."

G. K. CHESTERTON.

THE PASSAGE of the Malvern Tunnel, in these days at any rate, is like leaving one world for another. It is the moment of death to the old world, while the emergence is a kind of rebirth. But the rebirth is the restoration of a rich lost world, bitterly impoverished in so many areas on the other side of the Tunnel. It is not, of course, true that Herefordshire has escaped scot-free from the spoliations, river pollutions and defacements, the suburban spread, military occupations, factory-farming and tree-fellings of many counties east of the Malverns. That could not be—witness the devastation of the Teme Valley—but it is comparatively true. The wounds and scars are much less visible and they certainly do not go so deep. And so the sense of bondage is broken.

The impression of release, of a lightening of the spirit, of an ampler freer air is assisted by a natural change which has been unchanged for centuries. The traveller has entered the country of the Hereford cattle and the Ryeland sheep; of the Kingston Black cider apple and the Golding hop; of the Worcester Pearmain apple come to glory instead of being thrown to the pigs; of John Abel and the magpie style of the timbered house; of the needle

spire and the blunt tower just peering over the high-roofed nave and pre-eminently of the permanent pasture and the grassy orchard. There are hōp-yards, orchards, half-timbered houses and needle spires elsewhere and Herefords and Ryelands have crossed the boundaries far and wide. But the differences remain so because these things are more native to Herefordshire than in the rest of England. They rise to a climax when the day dawns at the end of the Tunnel. There are plenty of orchards, for instance, in Worcestershire, probably double the number to the square mile in the Evesham-Pershore region than over the same area anywhere in Herefordshire. Yet they are different, even when grassed. Zealously cultivated as are the Herefordshire orchards, they have not submitted to the iron discipline of mass-production to the same extent as in the Vale of Evesham. They have a more spacious air and are less regimented, while their freer growth gives them the happier air of belonging to their own native soil.

All these differences are to be derived from the maternity of that soil. It may be that the Liassic deposits of Evesham and the Brit Valley are as rich as the Old Red Sandstone of Herefordshire; it may be that the greensand belt that valences the chalk downland below the springs is as kind and fruitful. But the lias and greensand of England only occur in pockets, belts and strictly limited areas; the Devonian sandstone of Herefordshire covers, if the old rye lands of the north be excepted, nearly the whole county, and that county is as generous in length and breadth as in vegetation. It moulds and kneads its generosity of contour no less than originates and conditions its exuberant fertility. It is this abundance and fecundity of natural growth, this freedom of diversity in fold and shape in a land of many waters and laughing hills that welcome the traveller out of the tunnel. But what gives his spirit wings is that the will of the Old Red Sandstone stamped upon that green life and landscape is not yet smudged or effaced.

II

I was on my way to see a farm and enjoy the hospitality of a farmer who, in spite of unremitting pressure from without, still practises upon it the arts of the husbandman. I expected therefore to find in a few days and within the speck of a few acres the heart of Herefordshire. But what I did not expect was to see a farm,

organically husbanded and thus faithful to the old spirit of the county, so royally staged. It was as though the whole of the West Country had risen about this little farm of 160 acres to stretch out a Titanic hand and bless it and the man who loved and gardened it. It was situated on a knoll above the river Lugg less than a mile from its junction with the Wye at Mordiford. Over the dark tower of Hereford Cathedral to the west, across the Golden Valley to the south and west and half Monmouthshire to the south-west, it faced the whole range of the Black Mountains. The Skirrid, the holy mount whose side slid and fell at the Crucifixion, was the companion pillar to the Sugar Loaf across the Abergavenny Gap. Like a buzzard floating above them, the sight swung in a tremendous arc to the Gader Point and along the Gader Ridge to Hay Bluff that hid the Brecon Beacon that hides Hereford's Knob and the Kilvert country round Clyro, and by a slight shifting of ground as far as Robin Hood's Butts and Wellington Wood to the north. A step to one side and I could take in the whole area between Radnor Forest and the Forest of Dean, the Black Mountains and the Malverns. No wonder the Saxons were stopped at that great barrier between the two kingdoms!

Yet the Herefordshire hills were by no means dwarfed by this imposing back-cloth scene-painting. The peculiarity of the site of the farm was that by strolling from the lawn to the kitchen garden or from one end of the rose-garden to the other, I could take in fresh hills like actors entering from the wings to take their places on the crowded stage. The Wye Valley flanked by the wooded Fownhope hills, Aconbury and Dinedor were there to the south; the hills above Holme Lacey to the south-west; shaggy Credenhill and its twin, Garnons, to the north-west; Backbery promontory across the little Frome or "Frummy" valley by the house; Stoke Edith and the church on its flank, with the British Camp (Herefordshire Beacon) beside it, to the east below the rose-garden that was once the archery ground of Kilvert's Baskervilles, and still further to the direct east the bastion of the Malverns that seemed to guard this treasure of land from modern intrusion. The Beacon was alone familiar to me; I used years ago to lie on its ramp and dream of England in the footsteps of William Langland. The rest was all new and marvellous to me.

One after another these nearby bearded hills looked in on the

little farm perched on its knoll as though to pass a friendly word with it. And Herefordshire is the most friendly as it is the richest of counties. The key to its beauty is, I think, that this luxuriance and friendliness are fused with grandeur and wildness and spaciousness in the multiplicity of timbered hills tossing up everywhere with all the irregularity but without the oddity of the hills of the Upper Lias in Somerset, Dorset and Worcestershire.

Generous, as we say, to a fault, and so the farmers farm and the gardeners garden in a large and lavish manner quite different from the intensity of the market-gardeners of Evesham Vale. That is the way you must farm to be true to the land of Herefordshire. A land that gives with both hands. I found the wheat in full ear in mid-June, the rose and cistus in bloom when in Oxfordshire where I had come from not a rose nor an ear was, except in sheltered corners, to be seen. I saw the biggest white poplar I had ever set eyes on and a path of *Gentiana acaulis* whose leaves hid the ground. The wisteria up the wall of one of the outbuildings of the house on the knoll covered the whole of it, reached the roof and was climbing the chimney. My host told me later that on December 21st in 1944 he had picked a bowl-full of Princess of Wales violets ten inches high. The currants were as big as out-of-door grapes. The Royal Sovereign strawberries were Falstaffian; to get one of these monsters into the mouth off the stalk would have interrupted conversation, and half a dozen was a plateful:

“Earth’s increase, foison plenty,
Barns and garners never empty;
Vines with clust’ring branches growing
Plants with goodly burden bowing;”

But there was another reason for this than primal Hereford bounty. The farmer himself had biological ideas; he was a student of his native soil and a canonist in the Rule of Return. What he took away he rendered back according to the Natural Law; to the uttermost farthing he repaid what he received. The hub of the seasonal cycle in that garden was the balance of give and take, decay and renewal. He paid his earth-dues religiously; he kept faith as well as acquired knowledge; his was a practice of loving no less than learning. They came together in wisdom which is neither love nor learning but both in one.

These principles he extended to the world at large and so, like my yeoman friend in Somerset, is a conscious pioneer, a believer in the England which Cobbett championed. When Cobbett came to Herefordshire, he created "a sort of buzz." "'Here he is,' said one man to another. 'Yes, God damn him,' said the other." A century later, my friend says to me, "I have always held his views." He is a survivor of Cobbett's England as well as a pioneer towards it. My Somerset friend is a pioneer among a traditional company; my Herefordshire friend combines these two seeming opposites in his own person.

For he is a Herefordshire man whose roots are so deep in his own place that there is no getting down to where they begin. If lucerne can go thirty feet down into the soil, he can go ten centuries. It is right that the Black Mountains should be the frontiers of his view when a forefather of his married the daughter of Owen Glendower. There was state as well as blood in the ancestral stake in Herefordshire land long before as well as after Glendower, and his Border lineage was once strong in fiefs, manors and messuages, in castles as well as cows. The broad acres have run down in the hour-glass to 160, the demesne has shrunk to a home-farm and of the ancient glory there remains *noblesse oblige* to the land and to his fellow-men.

My friend has no longer the noble opportunities of the past. I do not know how he feels about it, but I know that he has lost nothing. Somehow, all the qualities we associate with *gentilhood*, namely honour, integrity, courtesy, fearlessness and gentleness have been distilled into this freeholder of 160 acres, this farmer who never goes out on his land without his paddle to spud up the thistles. The farmer's foot fats the land, such might be carved on this rod of office he modestly bears, and what wand more honourable and worthy of his inheritance from the Catholic gentry of the Border? His ancestry may have done more spectacular deeds, but what he has done for his farm, for Herefordshire and so for England should make any man proud. In listening to him, I got to know more about his native county in two days than the uninstructed tourist there would or could have learned in two years. He may be said then to have the proudest title of all, not a duke or an earl or a knight of his shire, but one of the most faithful of its sons from Domesday Book in which his family figures to the present day.

The power has passed from the heir to the usurper, from the countryman to the urban official, from land to money. So the matchless grove oaks have been felled in the Teme Valley, while in the Valley of the Lugg, whose course I could trace from the knoll, the weir (the Romans were the first to build one here) has been blown up, the trees of the banks cut down, their sides have eroded, the river has dropped thrèe feet and the water-meadows, once quickened by the flood-waters to a prime value for fattening beasts, have swiftly deteriorated. Part of them has even been ploughed up. Whitehall was in fact too idle or ignorant to put in flood-gates, while the power lost at the mill for a turbine would have been enough to supply the whole county with electricity.

III

The farm itself, which this man has cultivated since 1906, is a mixed one, of hop-yards, 14 acres of cereals, beans, leys, permanent pastures and orchards upon them, nearly all of them on high land and slopes. They were all keyed up to a high condition of fertility by a magnificent herd of some 90 T.T. and attested pedigree Jerseys; my host is the only farmer in Herefordshire to keep one. They were the pride of his heart and for two very good reasons: they were the linch-pin of his whole system of rotated and organic husbandry and they produced milk for sale and butter for the household than which none other could be compared. Yet the policy of the Ministry of Agriculture has been in effect to force him to sell part of this herd by encroaching more and more upon his limited area of pasture and turning the farm into a small factory for the production of money-crops. It would be highly profitable for him to do so, since he would be rid of the onus of maintaining the poise and balance of the farm against such measures against them, not to speak of pocketing a round sum that might well reach from eight to ten thousand pounds. He would be relieved of the constant struggle to safeguard what are left of the permanent pastures whose goodness and fatness are the secret of the gloss and rotundity and perfect health of his milking herd. He would no longer be faced with the perplexity of nearing the border-line of overstocking the farm which such policy has enforced upon him.

These pastures were indeed grazed down to the bone. How comfortably they stood up to it! A mere glance at them disclosed what princely pastures they were; close-meshed lawns under the fruit-trees, the staple of the herd moving like large deer among the dappled shadows of the pears and apples. And how wise this observant man had been to fight for them! Our present agricultural policy, being urban, has little enough to do with observation in the field. It is unaware of the fact that the best grazing pastures contain at least 25 per cent of "weeds" of the utmost value to the cow for digestive and excretory purposes, and so reacting upon her stamina, health and breeding capacity.

My host told me a striking example of the nutritive value of weeds. At the end of January, the golden plover, called by W. H. Hudson the "battitu" from its Indian name, migrates from the Southern States of North America 1000 miles east to the Atlantic and down with the trade winds until it reaches the Argentine. Here it turns in west for no other purpose but to feed on the seeds of the Argentine thistle that grows taller than a man. These plovers he used to shoot on their journey for the pot, so fat from the oil of the thistle-seed that they often burst when they hit the ground.

Nowadays we are supercilious about nature's powers as a farmer; we "conquer," not take counsel of her, and yet she has supported millions of herbivores for millions of years on plain grass. She has arranged the constituents of her pastures in such a way that the varieties of the grasses and herbs balance one another in the niceties of nutrition. Nature always acts relatively to time, place and occasion; we standardise an idea and apply it indiscriminately, ploughing up the good permanent pastures with the bad and giving their substitutes no chance to settle in for good hay and good grazing. Nor do we listen to the warning voices, one of which, that of Professor W. R. Williams of Moscow, ascribes the decay of past civilisations to loss of soil-fertility by the destruction of the soil's crumb-structure in the ploughing up of grasslands.

But on this farm I could see the "symbiosis," the interplay of vitality between grass, herd and trees, cattle and pasture, each conferring wealth upon the other and swelling the fruit on the trees. The poetry of the sight ratified the excellence of the relation. It was clear that the loss of the herd or the ploughing

of the pastures would have ruined the whole economy of the farm. Yet this true husbandman, whose herd has continually passed the highest test of all, rarely mentioned because very few herds in England could stand up to it, was denied the bonus of 4d. a gallon on quality milk. This was because he had had a contract with a neighbouring farmer to dispose of his milk before the Milk Marketing Board was founded.

England possesses the best pedigree herds and the worst dairy cows in the world. The modern reversal of husbandry, the loss of rural self-management and the transference of all power to finance and an urban bureaucracy have fathered a policy of forcing the milch cow to a weight of gallonage which has fostered disease among 80 per cent of the cow population and reduced its average life to $2\frac{1}{2}$ lactations. The average lactation of this herd over a long period was eight years. The average milk-yield is well over 700 gallons a year. Some have been mothers of 13 and 14 calves; others, crossed with Lincoln Reds, have borne 13 calves in 13 years, or 12 calves in 12 years, giving over 1000 gallons with the twelfth calf and averaging 1200 gallons over 4 years. Another pure-bred Jersey had 12 calves in 12 years, averaging 780 gallons over 8 years.

The true test of any cow is its normal health and normal milk-yield, and there can be no doubt that the policy of calculating the "output per cow" is just as fallacious as the corresponding error of "output per man." Any fool can step up an average yield of 700 gallons per annum to 1000 or even 1500 simply by over-feeding—at the cost of disease and a premature death. The quantitative estimates of milk-yield—"Treat a cow exactly as you would a motor-car" as one of our agricultural professors remarked at a lecture—are an abuse of nature. The remark is a perfect example of what Dr. Toynbee in *A Study of History* has called the "Apathetic Fallacy": "We are sufficiently on our guard against the so-called 'Pathetic Fallacy' of imaginatively endowing inanimate objects with life. We now fall victims to the inverse 'Apathetic Fallacy' of treating living creatures as though they were inanimate."¹

The true test of the Jersey is its butter-fat capacity and in this it has no rival. Here I saw them carrying the whole farm, feeding, fertilizing, invigorating it as they were fed by it into years of vigour and productiveness. It was a very long time since their

¹ Vol. I, pp. 8 and 271.

owner had bought one with the danger of buying disease with it in the open market. All the heifer calves were reared and I saw them in the pens and other pastures looking, moving, quivering with sensibility like antelopes. Because of compulsory shortage of pasture-land, they are fed in the yards on oats and beans, kale, mangels, oat-straw and seeds hay from November to April. But their real food is plain grass or rather grass with mysterious and manifold properties. Thanks to the Old Red Sandstone, breast of abundance, but as much to the organic husbandry of this human scion of the oldest Herefordshire stock, fifteen in-calf heifers were supported on nine acres of permanent pasture, grassland too liberally planted with fruit-trees. Oatstraw was the only additional food given. Nine acres of a grass-orchard of Bramleys supported eleven in-calf heifers in November, 1944, and these had been fed on nothing but grass since calthood. Yet, so my host wrote, they were in spite of persistent wet weather in the prime of health.

The health of all, calves, yearlings and cows, shone out of them; it was manifest in every nimble step and toss of the head, no less than in body-build and the silk and lustre of the hide. In the corner of one field was a hillock of dung, straw, ditchings and road-sweepings, into which compost drained the liquid manure from the yards. That with the heavy dunging of the orchard pastures by the grazing herd explained the longevity, the rich yields, the sheened coats, the brisk action, the gallant bearing of the herd itself. The farm was a medical certificate of biological immunity to disease as contrasted with the artificial immunity conferred by vaccines, injections and the like. Its message was—begin at the right end, the soil, the pasture, the natural out-door life of the herd, instead of at the wrong end, the test-tube.

I have a considered conviction that, if a thing is right, it looks right, and, if it has goodness at the heart, beauty goes with it. Beauty had been poured into the mould of this man's "agricultural righteousness." I have seen something of England's beauties that our pious forefathers nursed into something even lovelier than nature's. But it would be hard to beat the eyeable virtue of this herd, elegantly treading the sweet turf of these orcharded dips beside the leaning hop-yards, zoned with the shapely hills, their vales jewelled with tower and spire, their slopes warm with woodland and the purple mountains topping all. The human and

aesthetic values were an essential part of the organism of the farm, its crown as the mountains were the crown of the scene. The cows came to his call and they all had flower-names, Rosemary, Marigold, Ixia, Magnolia, Cyclamen, Viola, Lupin, Stephanotis. Their colours were as various, from deep mulberry through a gamut of shades to palest fawn or buff. One or two were brindled, and the half-breds by Lincoln Reds or Guernseys added to the gaiety and vivacity of the scene. They gazed at him with their large and luminous eyes, like pools in shade, as though he were the bell-wether of a flock of ewes. He not only knew them all by name at a glance, but their characters and foibles and adventures. He was their paterfamilias, the family farmer at the topmost meaning of the word. If he did not actually do all his own cultivations, he did the brooding and the thinking. And the something more deeply interfused, the touch of grace, of what should be called *pietas*, this was the greatness of his reward.

IV

The fruit, too, was a wonder. It was this orchardist's view that fruit trees and bushes should be pruned and shaped as young things only and according to their variety of mission. They should then be left alone and the knife used only to cut out dead wood and scions. Fruit would thus follow, each according to its kind "as the great God intended." The herd that grazed under the trees was largely responsible for the flavour and magnitude of the orchard crops. Fruit of all kinds, soft and hard, for cider, for jam and for dessert, cherries, apples and pears in the main with two acres of blackcurrants. Formerly, my host used to grow a hundred tons annually of the best jam-strawberries in England. He hardly needed to tell me that the cherry orchard bore ten tons from four acres and that in one of the pear orchards six of the trees had in the previous year yielded three tons. I could see the exuberance of these trees for myself: their leaves seemed hardly to outnumber their fruits. It was charming that one only had to walk from the orchards to the house to find that noble book in two volumes—*Herefordshire Pomona*—given to his mother in the eighties of the last century by the author. It contains a description of the almost lost and peerless apple, *Ashmead's Kernel*, a seedling from *Nonpareil* raised by Dr. Ashmead in 1700.

I first saw the pear orchard across a narrow bottom from a high field of seeds hay, cocksfoot, rye-grass, timothy and clover, ripe for cutting. It sloped gently down to the foot of the green cleft and was flanked by hop-yards and corn. The position of this orchard with its close lawn-like pasture and the constellation of trees under the brow of Shucknall Hill and within sight of Robin Hood's Butts and the Malverns was Arcadian. It might have been a gifted illustration to Browne's *Brittania's Pastorals*. But looking from under the trees up at the multitudes of little pears studding the branches, so many that they looked as though in ripeness they would break down their branches, was better still. The earth's increase was added to the fairness of the prospect, and this was invariably Cobbett's test of good country. From one of these pears—Moorcroft or the Malvern Pear—my host has made a perry that takes fifteen years to mature. He expects it to be like a good hock and promises me some bottles. May I live to crack them!

What was the secret of such prolificacy? The trees were unwashed and unpruned—they had been left to nature. Was it then the soil, perhaps the kindest of all our soils to the pear? Partly yes. But nature gives of her best under the wisdom and guidance of man. The final answer was the heavy stocking of the pasture with the Jersey herd. The very shortness of the grass had conditioned the yield of the trees above it. Grazing, dunging and harrowing were what had loaded their branches.

I saw these orchards big with increase towards the close of a drought which had lasted with intervals of showers and thunderstorms for 18 months. I saw them after a dry summer, a dry autumn, a dry winter, a dry spring and a dry end of it. The bare statement is more worth than pages of argument for the virtues of organic farming. As my host said—provided the soil is "alive," that is to say, well stocked with humus, and that correct cultivations are undertaken at the right time, plant life actually prefers drought with its attendant sunshine. There could not have been a greater contrast between these Herefordshire crops and orchards than the wheat I had previously seen on Salisbury Plain, drenched with sulphuric acid against weeds and heavily "manured" with chemicals. The drought was halving these crops: here it was their ally. Had I not known the name of this farm, I should have invented it. Pomona Farm.

No rain, only mizzle, had fallen on these orchards for weeks of the worst drought in living memory, while the May frosts had bare-swept the orchards in hollows and on plains. On these slopes above the Valley of the Lugg, humus had resisted the drought and height the frosts. A high orchard of Bramleys under the protection of woodland had reaped the benefit of both shelter and elevation, and the year before the Bramleys (on the grass fed off by stock) had many of them weighed 2 lbs. apiece. In 1944, the year I saw them, they were as thick on the trees as stars in tropic skies. Off one of these trees were picked 18 40-lb. boxes. Here too I heard the Worcester Pearmain vindicated from its vile reputation elsewhere as an eater. Growing it myself, I needed convincing that there was something more to it than painted cheeks and as a cross-pollinator to Cox. In my ignorance I accounted it mere harlotry, but in the West it queens it over all. If plucked dead ripe—on Herefordshire soil well stocked with plant food—there is, my host told me, no flavour except those of Cox and Ribston and Blenheim to match it as a summer apple. His Ribston Pippins, of which I have eaten a large crate, are hardly inferior to Cox, its descendant. Locality is the arbiter of the orchard as of all crops. You can grow apples almost anywhere in England, but only on certain soils are their flavours and general qualities superb. My host told me that in Virginia the finest tobacco is grown on one side of a certain road but not on the other. So it is with the world's greatest vines, among the vineyards of the Côte d'Or.

After the Royal Sovereign strawberries (the runners pegged down on yearling plants and transplanted to a prepared new bed rich in humus and Tardive de Léopold playing the same rôle as Worcester to Cox), I could believe anything. With these orchards my host had experimented, since he is too careful a husbandman to trust in his instincts and even his convictions as an organic farmer without trial and error and the burden of proof. Some of the trees were winter-washed with tar-oil and, as he said, with almost magical effect on the foliage. But what would be, he asked himself, the cumulative effect on the soil? He would wait and see. But in the meantime, the richly dunged unwashed orchards were bearing such crops as in the myth of the Hesperides.

Some weeks later I came across by chance a wholly mechanised fruit farm of more than 1000 acres. Several good farms had been

absorbed into it. But for cocoa bean husks and hoof shoddy for the currants, it was "fed" entirely by chemical fertilizers, principally nitrate of soda and sulphate of ammonia. It was a dramatic illustration of Mr. F. A. Secrett's words in the *Journal of Applied Biology*:

"In the past most crops were healthy, but with the change in the conditions of the soil, disease and insect pests became more prevalent year by year and the use of dry and wet sprays became general throughout the industry."

The fruit this farm spared was mechanically graded. There was no hand-grading: the pears were dropped from the grading machine into bins whence they were crated and dumped into lorries to be transported over long distances. The result was that about four pears out of every crate reached the market sound. I wonder whether even the survivors were worth eating. Grading is mainly purposed for the monster fruit, and the natural smaller fruit, with incomparably the best quality and the sugars close under the skin, gets only a pass degree. The raspberries were packed into barrels, treated with water and some sulphur chemical, bleached until they were dead-white, sealed and transported for what is called jam. Some way off this from the natural preservation of, for instance, apricots dried in the sun! One of the orchards of Coxes was so far away from the centre of the farm that in the previous year they had been left to rot on the ground. In the old days, windfalls were the perquisites of the workers. But this ultra-modern and progressive farm polished the windfalls and sold them for 1s. 6d. a lb. Enormous wastage was thus accompanied by a parsimony that had nothing to do with thrift and defeated itself, since the pickers were given every encouragement to steal what they regarded as their own.

The hop-yards on Pomona Farm received heavy dressings of farmyard manure and to my amateurish eye looked all that could be expected of this very ticklish crop. I was reminded of the Guinness hop-farm in Sussex where even the string was taken out of the old hop-bine to mix in with sewage sludge from Southwark . . . result: average yield a ton per acre. The Herefordshire aristocrat is Mathon, one of the Goldings, the commoner is the Fuggle hop and, on analogy with the Jerseys, they are grown

from their own cuttings. Goldings are used by the brewers whole for their finer ales in dry hopping; the coarser Fuggie is a copper hop and is mashed up. Yet on this land they were not coarse at all. Herefordshire soil and organic nourishment had promoted them into the lower rank of the Golding. Their cultivation is an art in itself; they are scuffled, rolled, ploughed with a share of particular shape and ridged up—the older method being to earth up each plant separately. The lanes between the hop-lines are broken down to the finest possible tilth and to protect them from the winds their hedges must be high. Some of these, by that vein of poetry in their grower which is a *sine qua non* of good husbandry, were balsam poplars. In war-time, with its short views and methods of expediency, nitrate of soda and potash were used on them. They seem to do them no harm and as *supplementary* to a soil full of humus there is no *apparent* reason why they should. But this farmer has to keep an anxious eye for outbursts of the mosaic virus, and he called my attention to the hops growing wild in the hedge-rows, more robust and taller in this natural compost than any in the yards.

It is this acuteness of observation, now rare, that is the hallmark of right husbandry. The owner of Pomona Farm quoted to me the saying of a Herefordshire farmer—"A man should live as though he were going to die to-morrow and farm as though he were going to live for ever." All unconsciously, he was speaking of himself.

The wheat, the short-strawed but long-eared Holdfast, was free of any sign of rust, clean of weeds and of that evenness that delights the farmer's eye. When it was threshed out in the winter, the man in charge of the threshing machine said that it was the best sample, grain and straw, he had handled that year. Yet it was the third white straw crop in succession. It needs a land in the very best of heart to stand up to such war-farming. Later I heard from my friend that on this Holdfast field he had sown, as an experiment in creating a permanent pasture, 10 lbs. of lucerne to the acre and a mixture of Italian and perennial ryegrass, timothy and wild white clover. The deep-rooting lucerne would, he hoped, restore the field from the attentions of Whitehall by tapping the plant-foods in the sub-soil.

The beans were seven feet high and the Fuggie hops before the war had made 26 cwts. to 5 acres. But that was because they had

been moulded up by hand and manured with ground hoof—an organic nitrogen. They were certainly an advertisement for organic husbandry. It was one of the ironies of this particular farm whose permanent pastures are superlative that its owner was compelled to grow temporary leys at their expense. No other age and no other country where farming is the feet of the commonwealth would believe it possible that a husbandman of this knowledge, of this land-ancestry and of this care and responsibility for his charge should have his judgment over-ruled, his management curtailed and his cropping programme dictated. Still, he gets his own way sometimes because it is the only way that works. His little farm may not please the new England. But, as he wrote me later, it “has done something for old England.” And something yet more for the England of the future.

Perhaps my choicest discovery on a farm glowing with life and beauty was one of its workers. He was making a gate in the cherry orchard. When he straightened up and walked with long and leisurely strides towards me, I had a sudden revelation of the far away and long ago. I saw W. H. Hudson risen from the dead. The height (he must have been well over six feet), the stoop of the shoulders, the eagle-like Roman nose, the powerful loosely-knit frame, the deep-set eyes, the grizzled hair, the prominent cheek-bones, the sternness and the very shape of the face, this was Hudson walking along the obscure and dingy passage of the house in St. Luke's Road, Bayswater, to greet me.

The man was an old-timer of seventy-four and the strongest of men, while his air of aloof dignity and reticence was just like Hudson before conversation thawed him. He reminded me too of other experiences in my own past, the search for rare birds. For the craftsman-labourer, the all-rounder who can turn his hand to anything on the farm, the descendant of the dispossessed peasant, the man whose loss can never be compensated by the machine, the patient and knowledgeable resolver of all difficulties, the hard liver to whom nothing comes amiss, the 12-hour a day and in my young days the 14-shilling a week man, mower-ploughman-carpenter-shepherd-sower-reaper-horseman-stack-

builder-stockman-milker all in turn as occasion needed, this man is now become the rarest of birds. He is the neglected infantryman of agriculture; the skilled craftsman on whom a starving world will presently have to depend. On Pomona Farm, the jobs of this Jack-of-all-Trades had included tractor-driving, well-sinking and water-divining. George Henderson in *The Farming Ladder* has described that he hunted all the villages in the neighbourhood of Enstone in the Oxfordshire Cotswolds in vain for such a man. Such a man was this Jim Rogers, the spit of the greatest of countrymen, W. H. Hudson.

He told me something of his past life, mostly about his part in the old mowing and shearing gangs headed by the "lords." In mowing he himself used to cut $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres a day, while seven like him would mow 10 acres in the day which a tractor can only accomplish in a day and a half. English country was a full land then, not an empty one studded with "wens"; it was full of human life, not what has been called a "population" of tractors. Not only had he done all the jobs on the farm, but he used to make milk-cheeses that after two years' seasoning had to be cut open with a hatchet to get at its creamy contents within. But what struck me in particular was his contempt for the money-values of the modern farm-labourer. His idea was that he was doing worse for a £1 what the labourers of two generations back had done better for 5s. He himself had earned 14s. a week. So he had arrived at the conclusion that none of the present labourers were worth £3 odd a week. This was his way of lamenting the irreplaceable, his elegy on the decline of skilled labour. The job was the thing, not what was paid for it. It was good to think that he could work as he chose on this farm, kind in humanity as in land. So in his old age he would escape the fate of being wrenched from it, for the life of a true man is his work.

All day but especially in the evenings, my host and I would discuss the principles of good husbandry, his wife, who came from an Argentine *estancia*, lending colour, warmth and a delicate goodness to the hours. He once wrote to me:

"Quality, quality, that should be the aim of all who grow anything and it is the true organic principles which give the richness, the flavour, the goodness, the health."

His fields that gave it, his wife that spiritually emanated it, his own grace of character brought the human and the natural into harmony. What is not understood by this generation is that the right principles of human society are deeply involved in the meanings of good husbandry. The great trouble that has come upon the world is that it has ceased to know or to cherish any first principles at all. It lives by power, not principles, by ideology not first causes or the Natural Law. It is a lost world with the devilish corruption of Germany as its caricature.

Being of all men I have ever met the most skilful of dairymen, my host insisted on the modern error of concentrating on the bull instead of the cow, and incidentally depriving him of his natural functions by the odious automatism of conveying his life-force to the cow in a test-tube. The end of quality, since nature's way is to impregnate the cow with only one, the richest in vitality and speed, of the spermatazoa. Is the mother of less importance than the father? Or do we imagine that milking machines and pasteurization make our milch cows healthy animals? We waste pots of money on artificial insemination centres and are unable to prevent four-fifths of our milking herds from sickness and abortion. Diseased livestock, deteriorating soils, cereals afflicted with thirty different maladies, an emptied countryside, distributors making more than producers, bread with the life-germ extracted from it, fruit-trees drenched with poison-sprays, fresh food a luxury, these are the fine fruits of factory farming.

Pomona Farm is managed on organic principles. The rule of return is its star. Yet, as I have described and by the compulsion of war conditions, its farmer winter-washes some of his orchards; he has slagged as well as dunged the permanent pastures, used nitrate of soda and potash on the hops and some of the other arable. These measures go against the grain, and he told me he had seen the holocausts of our friends, the worms, by the tar-oil distillates for spraying. For the hops he could no longer obtain the pit pony manure he used to buy in railway truck-loads.

His conception (and he is a disciple of Sir Albert Howard) was that within reason, which means supplementary to humus, inorganics like Chilean nitrates, rock phosphates and muriate of potash extracted from the earth were permissible for short-term mass-production of crops. But not synthetic ones: sulphate of ammonia, for instance, is nothing but a poison. To the list of

earth-substances he added lime, potash and agricultural salt—the last recommended by Cobbett—as on occasion beneficial. He himself uses very finely ground limestone from Glamorganshire. But great caution and experience are indispensable in the use of all these inorganics. Herefordshire soil, for instance, is limeless, as I could see very well for myself by that path of *Gentiana acaulis*. But the animals get their lime from the rivers and the bone of the Hereford cattle is unsurpassed. And what crops this limeless soil produces, how rich the natural vegetation and lofty the timber!

My own view—and here I took up his remark about the worms—was that any inorganics used on the soil should be studied in relation to their effect on the bacteria and these earthworms in the soil. If they inhibited the action of these last or, worse, destroyed them, they were worthless and evil farming. For always and in whatever circumstances, the rule of return was a portion of the Natural Law that must be obeyed.

This is what Gilbert White has to say about the *Lumbricadae*, our homely earthworm:

“Earthworms seem to be the great promoters of vegetation which would proceed but lamely without them, by boring, perforating and loosening the soil, and rendering it pervious to rains and the fibres of plants, by drawing straws and stalks of all kinds into it; and most of all, by throwing up such infinite numbers of lumps of earth. . . . The earth without worms would soon become cold, hard-bound and void of fermentation; and consequently sterile.”

What are these “lumps of earth”? Darwin in “The Formation of Vegetable Mould by the Action of Worms with Observation on their Habits” has unequivocally answered that they are humus, viz., fertility:

“The bones of dead animals, the harder parts of insects, the shells of land-molluscs, leaves, twigs, etc., are before long buried beneath the accumulated castings of worms, and are thus brought in a more or less decayed state within reach of the roots of plants. . . . The leaves which are dragged into the burrows as food, after being torn into the finest shreds, partially

digested and saturated with intestinal and urinary secretions, are commingled with much earth. This earth forms the dark coloured rich humus which almost everywhere covers the surface of the land with a fairly well-defined layer or mantle."

In short, the fertile top-soil of the earth's surface on which human life entirely depends is the work of three agencies—disintegrated rock, decomposed vegetation and fungi, bacteria and earthworms. What the worms deposit is compost, containing all the plant-food needed. In fact, the whole surface of the soil passes through their bodies in a few years, while in breaking down vegetable matter they bring into play their calciferous glands to neutralise humic acid. They ventilate, they oxygenate and they drain. The plant loves their tunnels for extending its root-system. Tests by the Connecticut Experimental Station in 1943 disclosed that worm-castings contain nitrogen five times more abundant than in the top-spit of an average soil, phosphates seven times, potash eleven times and magnesium three times. The total humic content of these castings is 40 per cent greater. So to call the earthworms "the ploughs of God" is a well-chosen expression and to kill them suicide. Mr. Stewart Remington, the well-known chemist and writer of text-books for agricultural colleges, was good enough to send me an extract on earthworms from a chapter in a book of his not yet published. These are a few lines of it:

"The excessive use of artificial manures is undoubtedly destructive to worm life, and this again reacts on the bird life of a district, driving many useful birds who are the friends of both agricultural and horticultural workers to seek more congenial feeding grounds near the banks of rivers and streams. On our ordinary garden soils there may be 50,000 worms per acre. The seeds of trees and plants are also carted down by worms; and many of these seeds germinate, adding to the organic matter of the soil."

If then certain chemicals and factory by-products expel or destroy the earthworms, they are breaking a link in the chain of fertility and creation that neither man nor earth can do without.



CHAPTER IX

THE GOOD HUSBANDMAN

‘Agriculture is, or should be, the greatest of the crafts.’

LORD NORTHBOURNE,

Look to the Land.

MY NEXT EXAMPLE of organic farming comes from the borders of Wiltshire and Berkshire. It is not traditional but experimental farming, not a heritage but a novelty. It is in short pure pioneering and develops the tradition of husbandry in new ways without deliberately aiming to do so. It restores that tradition because the farmer discovered that good husbandry was the only practical way to farm. Though I lacked the opportunity of personally visiting the farm, I gathered part of my data over the lunch table with the farmer and the rest through the kind offices of Sir Albert Howard. They are significant of the springs of a new life that under the impetus of war and economic disaster are forcing their slow way through the dead volcanic crust of the present.

Mr. Friend Sykes began as a specialist in the breeding of prize Friesians and Berkshire pigs. He belonged to what I may call the Danæ class, whose beasts are figured in the farming papers standing as it were under a shower of gold. He was a kind of Guinea King in the number of expensive cups he had won at the shows, not only for his dairy cattle and his championship pigs but for his thoroughbred racehorses. He was just one of those Samurai you read about with gaping awe or ironic entertainment in that book of distorted agricultural history called *Great Farmers*. Then came the shock. The Accredited Milk Scheme was started and he was asked to submit a herd as proud as the celebrated sun-kine of Hercules to the tuberculin test. In the most superior herd of three counties, 66 per cent were found to be infected.

Contrary to popular opinion, a good farmer is the most adaptable of men (almost too much so when you consider how the mid-Victorian farmers swallowed the bait of the Teutonic

Leibig, the inventor of artificial manures), and so this farmer began to wonder what was amiss. Was it the imported concentrates which automatically produced these show galloners with their milk-spate records? Was it their mechanization which was responsible for loss of stamina and constitution? Why did cows make greedily for common wayside weeds on their way to the milking shed? He would only be able to unravel this knotty enigma by reversing the whole modern theory of milk-production, so beneficial to the soap and oil combines by the demand for their by-products, so favoured by authority and the darling of orthodox science. He would try nature's way and put ordinary good health and constitution before the quantitative assessment of living things. So the Friesian herd was sold off and Channel Islanders were installed in their stead. It should be noted in parenthesis that the Channel Islands cattle are on their own islands among the hardiest and most disease-free cattle in the world (Scott took them to the North Pole and the Americans to Alaska and Panama) by a traditional system of breeding and feeding.

At about this time nature sent up another danger signal. His most valuable breeding mare went down with contagious abortion and he was advised to shoot her. With the true farmer's combination of instinct with experiment he put her out to grass for two years on a paddock that had never been treated with inorganic manures. She recovered, lived to twenty-one and bred four perfect foals. She was cured neither by the knacker's yard nor doses of superstition from a bottle but solely by humus-rich grass. Another thread in this Design of Repentance was woven by a meeting with a well-known Downland farmer who, high up on the thin chalk, was growing heavier crops of grass and clovers than the best farmers could do in the lowlands. Inspired by this heretic our farmer took a new plunge. He sold his exhibition farm that was worth £100 an acre and bought another chalk farm on the 800 feet contour line that was worth £4 an acre, the general view being that it was not farming land at all but just "space-out-of-doors." This stuff (what in a limestone region would be called brash) was first subsoiled to a depth of two feet, was ploughed and harrowed several times, cleaned and heavily rolled twice over.

The Channel Islanders were folded on the old turf by the Hosier open-bail system. This is precisely the same as that of the

traditional hurdled sheep, a system, that is to say, of controlled intensive organic manuring which, when the sod is ploughed up, sets going a kind of sheet composting by the interaction through bacterial ferment between the decaying turf and the evenly distributed dung and urine. Neither farmyard muck nor artificials of any kind were used because the formation of humus took place on the spot as it does on the woodland floor.

The pioneer followed this up by two further measures, both of them putting the clock back in the first instance by a mere couple of generations, in the second by centuries. One was the adoption of mixed grazing in addition to that of the Channel Islanders who had replaced the overbred prize-winners stuffed with concentrates. The other grazers were sheep and geese, and it struck me at once when I learned this that there has been only one institution in our agricultural history which relied on cattle, sheep and geese to retain its vitality.

This, of course, was the co-operative common of the open field village, the special target of derision and contempt for the up-to-date agricultural expert whether in office or laboratory. Only to mention sheep and geese to-day is to evoke retrospective musings. The experts never pause to ask why, if these commons of the old village were the muddled wildernesses propaganda painted them, there was so great a demand for them during the time of the Enclosures. At any rate, by grazing cattle, sheep and geese over his upland pastures, and ploughing them up, Mr. Sykes got 20 tons of dung and urine per acre and took 18 sacks of wheat per acre or $2\frac{1}{2}$ times the national acreage.

After sowing his new farm with three corn-crops in war-time, he then reseeded them to a four-years ley with 21 lbs. of the usual mixture (but fescues, timothy, dogstail and meadow grass added to it), together with 35 lbs. of various legumes and deep-rooting plants like sainfoin, chicory, burnet and kidney vetch, nature's own subsoilers. The result was that, when the ley was ploughed up, there was enough surplus of humus not only for two root-breaks and a couple of corn-crops to follow but for the rich new sward in the next round of the rotation. In 1943, he took from two to three tons per acre from it or from one to two tons above the average of good meadowland. He has also converted all the unused straw on the farm by treading with his increased stock and added green waste from the hedges to make a rich compost,

mechanically watered and distributed. If all England were so farmed, what is the limit to the population England might support, and without using a handful of chemicals?

By his deep-rooting leys, my acquaintance has been putting the clock back not quite so far as in that of the mixed grazing, namely to Robert Elliot's now celebrated Clifton Park experiment, and Elliot died in 1914. Elliot converted exhausted and derelict hill-side land in Roxburghshire into the highest productivity by laying it down to four-year leys of deep-rooting grasses and legumes like those of this contemporary farmer. From them he took in his first season two tons of hay per acre and an aftermath, establishing afterwards a regular rotation of superfine corn and root crops alternately without using a single ounce of artificial manures. The land (grazed off by sheep) became so exceedingly fertile through the penetrating, aerating and humus-forming qualities of these deep-rooting plants that this typical yeoman was able to discard even the phosphates he had first used on his roots. And Elliot did not mince his words about the practice of chemical manuring. He called it "the decadence of farming."

The land that was worth £4 an acre is now worth £40. When this farmer first started on his downland farm he lost £2000 worth of livestock by disease. By the methods I have described he has rid his farm of all disease, increased the stamina of his stock and has built up a large tubercle-free home-bred dairy herd. The moral of it all? "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" and of that fear authentic husbandry is the reflection.

My next example is not of an individual but a community, not of men but boys. It reveals the integral association between organic farming and self-subsistence. Here again tradition is left behind; the experiment had no guidance from the past at all. Those who partook in it were devoid of agricultural experience, training or inherited aptitude. Only by chance did they even live in the country. Faith, determination and a sense of right action were their mentors. They not only succeeded, but a traditional husbandman could have found nothing in this great enterprise

to disquiet him. Before the spirit of boyhood is ground by the mills of manhood, wise leadership can educe from the former a pattern for living the latter has lost.

St. Columba's College is a small public school of 150 boys among the Dublin hills, which has become self-supporting, or nearly so, in the food it eats. In the words of its Warden, Mr. C. W. Sowby: "There can be no question that children everywhere should be educated to love the land which nourishes them, and that in turn nature will unfold to them a million secrets of the ways of plants, animals and birds, and of the soil itself." As a self-supporting community, this College is a true development of those primitive ones founded by the British saints in the Dark Ages.

The experiment was launched, as all pioneering without previous experience should be, from very small beginnings. The College has a farm of its own that began, some five years ago, with a few pig-styes and poultry houses. The boys then built more of them, and the College took on 4 acres of arable, then 14, then 42, and grew wheat, oats and potatoes. At this time, there was a shortage of oats in Ireland, wherefore a licence was obtained to equip a local mill which ground the oats cultivated by the School. This was by far the most important step of all: it integrated soil with food, the fields with the house, husbandry with nutrition. The need for fertilizers was fulfilled not by applying to the factory but by purchasing 15 milch cows and 42 sheep, while the poultry was increased to 30. By 1943, 42 acres were in cultivation and by the next year the acreage was extended into the two hundreds. The College possesses its own equipment; horses and bees have been added; there is a large vegetable garden and a 3½-acre field has been devoted to soft fruit. All the meat is killed and cured on the premises, and practically the whole College takes part on a voluntary basis in farm operations. There are five paid hands with twenty boys to assist and learn of them, the rest of the College taking part in group-jobs at the peak seasons. A kind of court-leet of masters, boys and regular workers meets at set intervals to discuss the farm programme. This healthy experiment has roused the enthusiasm of the boys and the practical results have been so successful, that a general weekly lecture has been given on agricultural theory and practice. It includes in its curriculum not only the routine issues of cropping, tillage,

stock-breeding, dairying and rotations, but (and here I opened my eyes wide) on deforestation, soil-erosion, green manuring and compost-making.

Is there *any* specialised agricultural college in all the British Isles that instils into its pupils the knowledge of composting and soil erosion? The interesting thing is that the experiment did not begin theoretically or on *a priori* principles at all; it began by doing things. Only after the farm had become a running concern, paying its own way and virtually supporting itself, did biological and other scientific explorations occupy the College. The boys who attend the lecture-room know how to plough, to make butter, to keep bees, to manage horses, to pilt brewer's grain, to lay hedges, to clean ditches, to crush and mill oats, to practise forestry (they have planted 1600 trees), to shepherd the flock, to do smithying and carpentering, to recondition outhouses as workshops, to build a road and even to run a printing press. This is the way to learn; to make instruction and mental exercise part of the good life. This realistic avoidance of specialisation is maintained by preventing the farm-work from interfering with the normal games and classes of the College. There is plenty of voluntary labour (and abundant labour is one secret of all good farming), but it is spare-time work, and so *hard* work, because the spirit is willing.

I have said that this public school farm is almost entirely self-supporting, and no farm can be so except on the principle of the rule of return. The farm is kept in fertility by composting, and the greatest energy and resourcefulness are devoted to it. No chemical fertilisers are used and 50 tons of compost are made in the year, on the principle of Sir Albert Howard's Indore Process. Ditchings, vegetable residues, leaves, thistles and nettles all find their way to the generating stations of humus. The Warden said in his letter that the neighbourhood was "rich in weeds" (this expression pleased me) for the boys to collect for the compost heaps. They even make silt-traps for it on the mountain-side. On a gorse-covered field of $5\frac{1}{2}$ acres they raised 50 tons of potatoes.

What is more, the health of the boys together with their proficiency in school-work has improved by leaps and bounds. Thus has been fulfilled the words of Dr. Bircher-Benner in *Food Science for All*:

"In youth too, even among children, you will find suffering enough, arising from the same causes (bad nutrition); and many of the results, moreover, will be hidden from the observer, since they affect the invisible mental life whose tragedy is the greater the less one can or will see it. All these sufferings are the consequences, direct or indirect, of many years of sins of nutrition arising from appetite, error or ignorance. And all these sufferings can be avoided, cured or alleviated by a healthy nourishment."

An inspector said he had never before seen such healthy complexions; an inward resistance has been built up against infectious disease and "when other schools (I quote from the Warden's letter to me) have been having influenza by thirties and forties, our Sanatorium has not had more than three or four." The College used to have many epidemics in the pre-farming and pre-composting days; now it has none. Self-supporting in the daily needs and actualities of College life, the farm has also become so financially. Its earliest venture was made possible by a loan of £32. By selling its produce at market prices, it has not only balanced its books but bought out of its sales the whole of its machinery and equipment. This includes a silo, cream-separator and churn, the mill and the stock.

Such an experiment is true pioneering. By practising the new science, the College gives a coherent and rational interpretation of a pre-scientific husbandry obtaining its results from intuition and observation. By advancing beyond and out of the anti-traditional bias of our times, it recovers the rural tradition in a new form. Perhaps the only way we shall recover sanity in living, vitality in nutrition, husbandry in farming, a right use of the land and a pattern of behaviour in conformity with the rhythms of nature, is by experiments such as this one. Individuals and groups, that is to say, will disembarass themselves so far as possible from disintegrated and devitalised modes of living, and build up new and real lives of their own. The example of St. Columba himself and countless of his fellow-saints in wild and barren places is before them.

III

My last example is of a very different kind of pioneering with as different an aim. That aim was to make farming a "paying proposition," the reverse of St. Columba's. Yet this tale links up in an odd way with that of its predecessor. One day I found myself talking with a farmer beside a field of oats in that crumpled uneasy country which from the east prefaces the serene scarp of the Oxfordshire Cotswolds at Enstone. He was telling me about the self-supporting communities of Cistercians in Ireland and Leicestershire and how he had been struck by their virile health and the tenacity of life and vigour among the older monks. His mother, he said, had been ailing for many years. But since then she had come to live on his farm and had eaten its produce. Part of this was whole-wheat bread from his own corn which in small quantities (larger ones would have been illegal) he had had ground at the local grist-mill. Mrs. Henderson baked the flour herself. Such wholeness of living had made her hale and the two words come from the same root. The man I was talking to was Mr. George Henderson of Oathill Farm, who has made farming history by chronicling an experiment of twenty years on his 83-acre farm in *The Farming Ladder*. I had reviewed the book, I had known the country for many years and now I was seeing the farm.

The association between Oathill Farm and the forgotten Cistercians seemed very remote. At first sight, there appeared to be little enough connection between this farmer's enterprise and the religious vocation of the old agricultural monks or the educational aim of St. Columba's College. The farm is as severely utilitarian as it well could be, the farmer himself a modern strictly concerned with how to make his acres pay their way in a world of "efficiency" and profits. For this he has been criticised by an advocate of husbandry who is a zealot on behalf of its cultural aspects. A sentence in the book—"What a mistake it is to excuse inefficiency on the grounds that 'farming is a way of life'?"—would seem to lend colour to this attitude. When I had read the book and the criticism, I determined to see the farm for myself. I had an inward conviction that this criticism, though justified on the surface, had not gone beneath it.

It is important to state why I had this conviction. I shall refer to the book—which promises to become a classic of farming in the rank of Howard's *Agricultural Testament*, Michael Graham's *Soil and Sense* and Robert Elliot's *The Clifton Park System of Farming*—only as bearing upon this conviction. Anybody can read the book for himself and see what Mr. Henderson and his brother accomplished by intensity of production on a small mixed farm of which in time he and his brother became the freehold owners. It was not only derelict when he took it over but situated on the shallow brashy soil of the oolitic limestone of the Cotswold uplands. He will read in the book how he achieved the extraordinary feat of taking seven crops off one field in four years with the result that its fertility was higher at the end of the four years than at their beginning. He did so by hard grazing, by repeated ploughings, by variety of cropping, by diversity and abundance of livestock, by five-course rotations, by "the rule of return" and so the conservation and economic usage of all wastes, by devoted labour and by taking thought—in fact, by good husbandry. In his own words:

"The figure (a profit of £4484 in 1942) clearly shows what may be achieved by having a thorough grasp of the underlying principle for successful farming, which I have laid down in this book, and which may be summarised in three words: Work, Muck and Thought."

But when a farmer says, "the farmer's first duty is to his land" and "be prepared to take responsibility" and "do not bother how hard and how long you work," he is making such profits from husbandry by putting them second.

Since the two brothers increased the output of the farm by thirteen times what it was twenty years ago and its capital a hundred fold, the book is the most impressive vindication of the small farm yet written. No genuine farmer would doubt for a moment that the economy of the small farm intensively cultivated can beat and always will beat that of the large mechanised farm in output per acre. Statistics prove it. Mr. Henderson proves it. He tells us in his book that during the worst years of the between-the-wars depression, he was carrying "three times the cattle, four times the sheep, ten times the pigs and twenty-five times the

poultry" than the figures given of per-acre stocking by the Agricultural Returns for the whole county. Incidentally, he catches his workers young enough before they are corrupted by factory farming. For all his are pupils from schools—a further link here with St. Columba's School. They are trained on a profit-sharing basis. But the real point about them is that they represent a system of apprenticeship, to-day regarded as out-of-date.

But the imponderables, the values, the beauty, the continuity with the past were left out, and it was on this ground that the criticism I have referred to was directed against the book. My main reason for seeing the farm in person was my belief that the critic was more wrong than right. He did not consider in the first place that beauty has all but fled our island after inhabiting it for so many centuries. The conditions of its appearances are the common need and the common use and it can never be restored until this need and this utility are once more firmly based. Until, that is to say, the good thing in itself and its service takes precedence of the good thing that is made out of it. In the meantime, beauty comes second until husbandry is re-established as the normal faith and practice of those who live by the land.

Why has ugliness ousted beauty on English earth? The answer, I have no doubt, is because the earth itself is mishandled by a generation that has completely lost touch with it. Until husbandry, or loving management, is restored as the guiding principles of all workers on and by the land, we shall look for beauty in vain. For beauty in nature, on the land, in rural industry, in building, in every other transaction with the earth, proceeds from use, and the lack of husbandry in modern farming is misuse.

From what I had read in Mr. Henderson's book, I had gathered that this primary stipulation of the good thing coming before the good thing made out of it had been fulfilled. In spite of indications to the contrary. But I was taking no chances; I had to see the fulfilment in person and on the spot. And when I first saw the farm it was obvious that there were no flowers in this garden. The chicken houses from which Mr. Henderson folds his Light Sussex fowls over the land they have so wonderfully enriched, the piggeries, the bartons, the cattle-pens of the Jersey calves, the paddocks of the Clun and Border Leicester sheep, the electric wire fencing of the pastures, the very farmhouse itself

were exactly what an attentive reader of the book would have expected. Its plain style and technical matter were embodied in a farm whose severity of realism had bolted out the graces. But there are two meanings to the word "plain," the current sense and the one Milton used in the meaning of worth:

"When maidens such as Hester die,
Their worth you cannot well supply."

This farm was Quakerish like Charles Lamb's Hester.

I saw it in that sense partly because of my journey to it. I had come from Burford by the Evenlode Valley through Wychwood Forest. I had seen Wychwood deforested on its steeper slopes in such a way that sheet erosion is bound to follow; I had seen the reeds joining across the stream and choking its looped and winding flow; I had seen the ammunition dumps everywhere in and out of the woodlands like a new predator added to the British list of fauna; I had seen the aimless surburbanism of little towns like Charlbury that were once small jewels of stone set among the spacious uplands; I had seen the limestone walls and buildings gaping with rubble and I had seen, too, crops of corn that would have excited a page of frowns from Cobbett. If what I saw at journey's end was plain enough, it was so in the Miltonic sense.

It was what I saw before I realised I was on the farm-road made by the Henderson brothers that was the key to the whole. This was a field of oats. It was by no means the first I had passed that day. But it was so very different from all the others that I exclaimed aloud at it. That field in comparison with the other crops of oats was like the church or manor house in a village of cottages or a lofty tree in a copse of underwood. Not only was the straw at least thrice as tall as they but the oat-bells were more than double the number. And the field had that indescribable look of perfect health which corresponds with the patina of a stone. Cobbett's smile would have come out of his frowns like the sun. There were no weeds level with the ears; the richness of the crop had smothered them. There was no patchiness; the crop was even throughout. It was the first thing I said to the farmer—"those oats of yours."

I had my last words with him standing by them. They really were as important as I had surmised. One of the big stockless farmers of the neighbourhood who had come to see over Oathil'

Farm just before me—these farmers are now all big arable men mass-producing by artificials as they were doing to a lesser extent when they committed suicide or accepted bankruptcy in the thirties—said to Mr. Henderson, “I came to sneer and I go away to praise.”

The interesting thing was that the health abounding of this bumper crop had had its effect on Mr. Henderson himself. In his book he says:

“Wise and thoughtful people in recent years have drawn attention to the misuse of artificial manures. In our experience they do no permanent harm if used in conjunction with farm-yard manure and ploughed-in green crops.”

The field of oats I saw had been dressed with liquid manure from the big tank by the pig-house soaked into peat moss. He had another field on the farm also down to oats and for this he lacked enough of the peat humus and liquid manure to cover it. So he put a fertiliser on it and, as he told me, he himself could hardly believe the difference there was between them at the time of our July meeting. The organically fed field beat its fellow out of all reckoning. If there is one thing certain about artificial manures, it is that crops dressed with them cannot stand up to drought. They wilt and scorch. But this oat-crop had overcome the drought with tassels flying. He added that the only artificial manure he now used on the farm was superphosphate for the roots, not to “feed” but to speed them out of the ground in time for adequate cultivations on his limited acreage.

He told me further one of the most significant things I have ever heard. All round us were the big rolling fields of the more or less thousand-acre farmers wearing out their arable by the Government policy of “scrap your stock and grow corn.” In the spring he had noticed that the land was “blowing,” the first visible sign of the dust bowl. There was not the humus in the soil to hold it and its anchor was dragging. “Mine was the only farm,” he said, “that was not blowing.” Here was a parable of husbandry that needed no commentary.

In the spacious pig-house the brothers had built of wood and asbestos with a wallboard lining for an even temperature and a *glow floor for warmth*, Large Whites were reclining in the

domestic bliss of increase and multiply. I told him something of the ramp in pig-swill another farmer had told me. Being a processed product he did not believe in it and fed his pigs on whey from a cheese-factory and potatoes from the fields of the neighbouring farmers. In spite of the official discouragement of pig-keeping, this farmer by his intensive and organic methods could make fifteen shillings a week per pig.

We inspected a noble champion Jersey bull on the keeping of whom in good temper and fettle he had wise and humane views. There were, for instance, two Jersey calves next to the bull-pen, and he maintained that their company sweetened his bullishness. The calves were not quite the equal of those on Pomona Farm, where the touch is more intimate and the soil, of course, very much richer. But for calves on this brash they were wonderful, as the whole farm is, so revolutionary having been the impact upon it of mixed livestock, intensive husbandry, organic nourishment and self-sufficiency. As for the sheep, mostly grass Border Leicesters used as a hurdled flock, a breed I know well, I was so accustomed to seeing as a norm the sub-normal members of it that they took me completely by surprise.

But what took me even more so were the Light Sussex poultry, an old and so an all-round stock, used here as in the past for folding, fattening, pullets and egg-production. These folded, free-running and unspecialised birds in the poultry house, vital to the economy and the fertility of the whole farm, were so vital in themselves that they ceased to be reminiscent of depressed spinsters in seaside boarding houses. Except that they were a great deal fatter than he, they looked as though the proud jungle-cock had indeed been the paterfamilias of the varied tribe of domestic hens. I saw there was a cock among the troop and the sight of him standing like a pasha fresh from smiting the infidels among his harem in their communal house brought back to me something I had long forgotten:

“And with that word he fley down fro the beem,
For it was day, and eke his hennes alle,
And with a chuk he gan hem for to calle,
For he hadde founde a corn, lay in the yerd.
Real he was, he was namoore aferd.
He fethered Pertelote twenty tyme,

And trad hire eke as ofte, er it was pryme.
He looketh as it were a grym leoun,
And on his toos he roreth up and doun;
Hym deigned nat to sette his foot to grounde.
He chukketh, whan he hath a corne yfounde,
And to hym rennen thanne his wyves alle.
Thus roial, as a prince is in his halle,
Leve I this Chaunticleer in his pasture."

My feeling about the farm owned by the author of *The Farming Ladder* is one that neither he himself nor his appraisers have stressed. The impression the book gives is of a highly elaborate system of interdependent stocking and cropping, so intensive within a very limited area that a small farm can be made to pay much more handsomely than a large one. Granted, but what seems to me the point about this system is that it is a root-system. In seeing the farm, I was examining a root-system and noting how the root-hairs, the fibres, and the branches of the roots were building themselves down into the soil. It is, that is to say, bedrock farming. With extraordinary skill and acumen, with unwearying toil, the brothers have been working out the beginnings of a system of husbandry almost totally lacking from modern farming. They have been laying the foundations.

The plant analogy is the truer because Oathill Farm has achieved its unprecedented success by the organic development of the roots of agriculture in the soil. The Hendersons have been doing just what a sapling does when it is settling into the ground. We do not expect flowers of saplings. Neither should we expect the cultural graces, the rich overtones of an agriculture which is now by necessity concerned with the first rather than the second half of this significant dissyllable. Our ancestors by their pattern of life unconsciously interpreted it in its fullest meaning. But before farming can become godly and cultural once more, as it was with the peasant, the yeoman, the manorial village, and the market town, it must once more become consciously organic. Factory farming will pass: it is by its nature predatory and by its results ephemeral. But Oathill Farm is based on a root-system. When that becomes general again in England, as it is bound to become, the flower of culture will, as in the past, unfold upon its branches.

CHAPTER X

A CORNISHMAN IN WILTSHIRE—I

"Live as though you were going to die to-morrow; farm as though you were going to live for ever."

Herefordshire Farmer.

IT IS SIGNIFICANT that there was no sight-seeing of our countryside before the eighteenth century. Men like Leland, Aubrey and Harrison were recorders and surveyors rather than appraisers of landscape. The old builders were entirely indifferent to "views," and I remember only two references to them in Shakespeare. Edgar describes Dover Cliff to his blinded father and Percy points out Berkeley Castle "by yon tuft of trees." He must have seen it from the brow of Stinchcombe Hill because that dolorous castle is invisible from any other promontory of the Cotswold "Edge." Yet the masons of our traditional cottages, farmsteads, manors and churches were unerring in their powers of siting a house in perfect relation to its particular green environment, an art now lost. Shakespeare refrained from describing landscape, and yet he was one of the most deeply versed of our ruralists.

But in the late eighteenth century there were plenty of sight-seers, the Rev. W. Gilpin heading the list with his genteel aesthetics of the "Picturesque." Ever since his day the art of appreciating landscape for its own sake has been cultivated by a people becoming more and more urbanised. "Culture" has been pulled out by the roots from its native soil.

Thus there is a double paradox, When our civilisation was genuinely rural, articulate sight-seeing was unknown. As soon as it became urban, views became the fashion. The true explanation of this lies with Gilpin: the whole point of the Picturesque is that it is dissociated from utility, and that was how the subsequent sight-seers viewed their views. The new townsman regarded the countryside as a picture detached from himself because he had nothing to do either with making or using it.

Wordsworth, Emily Brontë, Constable and nearly all the water-colourists were reacting against this view of views because they saw landscape as interaction between man and nature or rather the Englishman and his native land. With the discovery of geology, this organic sense was partially reinstated. The rock-finder did not see landscape merely as a composition but as the consequences both in contour and vegetation of the earth's history, movements and constitution. But there was no fusion nor even contact between the picturesque and the scientific attitudes: the growing separatism of the age was all against it. The unifying link is in husbandry and that alone. Only when the geological, the aesthetic and the agricultural approaches to landscape cohere can the country be seen in its full and true values.

This "wholeness" is the key to the understanding of country as of all life. I have experienced it. Years ago, I was fairly familiar with the majestic and luxurious landscape of Wiltshire because I had studied it as an expression of its geological framework. That structure, at any rate in the chalk regions which cover two-thirds of the county, is simple and so rich in contrasts. The austerity of the Downland contours frames the softness of the river-vallies and of that master-valley of the greensand called the Vale of Pewsey dividing the Marlborough Downs from Salisbury "Plain." Tertiary beds overlie the chalk as in all the Downland counties, notably at Savernake, Grovely, the Great Ridge and the Calne woodlands. But they do so less confusingly than in Hampshire and Dorset, whither the great core of the Wiltshire massif fans out into long continuous ridges. Our Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age ancestors populated the plateau, crests and headlands of a Downland open to the sky, and the Romans merely passed through the county to and from their road-junctions at Sorbiodunum and Cunetio. But the Saxons and all who came after them dug themselves in deep along the narrow and variable valleys. There they met the memorials of their prehistoric forerunners along the lower slopes of the chalk scarp. Only a very few villages like Hindon and Avebury disturbed the bustard cruising the long green swells of this upland Atlantic.

So the Wiltshire Downs, parcelled between uplands and lowlands in space, were occupied by highlanders and lowlanders in as sharp a division of time. Each, adapting themselves to their respective spheres of habitation, remodelled them by making use

of the materials they found at their feet. Even Salisbury spire, the linch-pin to the spokes of the five rivers that meet under it, was built of the local Chilmark stone. The human imprint, historic and prehistoric, played a similar part in refashioning the Downland as denudation, frost, water and vegetation did in chiselling, softening and colouring the primal mass that rose from the sea.

In this way I formed a picture in my mind in which wind, weather, rock, plant, beast and man had one and all co-operated in composing the unity of the Wiltshire scene. When I revisited it, I was bent upon a different business, the utilitarian one of assisting in judging competitors in the building and thatching of flax-ricks. The contest was put in motion for the sake of reviving a dual craft in which earlier generations were masters. We are but bungling amateurs, painfully learning how to progress backwards. We are trying to bridge the great gaps in continuity of workmanship torn by the Industrial Revolution and the series of great depressions in agriculture—not because we want to but because we have to.

Since its revival, flax is grown in Wiltshire over widely scattered areas, and the first and second prizes went to stacks as far apart as Badminton in the heel of the Cotswolds and Winter-slow in the south near Figsbury Rings. Of the dozens we saw not even the best were more than workmanlike and the worst were makeshift indeed. Combination of all the good qualities and fine points that go to make a first-rate stack hardly ever occurred. These are good “footings” or “beds” for the proper preservation of the straw; well-sprung stems with projecting eaves and angles to the walls sloping inwards so that the rain in dripping from the eaves should fall clear from the straw; not only neat and close thatching with a clearly defined ridge-board but with the spicks or pins well staggered and not pointing too far downwards and, lastly, proper shaping of the structure and packing of the sheaves or “beats.” Only one of the ricks had used wet combed “reed” straw, and this was partly the reason why it gained the second prize.

As we travelled from rick to rick, I was seeing the country not face to face as a deliberate sight-seer but out of the tail of my eye. The landscape became as it were a by-product of the job in hand, as the ricks themselves were quite literally a by-product of the landscape. I count myself as well acquainted with Wiltshire as

any man whose qualifications for knowledge are not residential. But I began finding out things in days which previously I had missed in years of observation as my sole business. How came it that I had not noticed the classical regularity of that watershed dividing the Nadder and the Ebble Vallies over which from Harnham Hill to Whitesheet Hill runs the old coach road that was once a Bronze Age drove way? The headlands form a perfect *échelon* for the whole distance, like the zigzag of a Norman moulding over the tympanum of a porch or a chancel arch. This is by no means casual booty of the eye; it illustrates a principal characteristic of chalk downs, namely the tendency to repetition of like forms of which this range is the grand exemplar. Then again, how could I have failed to take in the reed-thatching particularly of the Upper Avon and Wylie Vallies with a technique very similar to that of Norfolk reed-thatching? This too is significant: Wiltshire is the only county of the chalk that is well watered. Its natives have evolved, independently of the Norfolk style with its chevroned ridge-board, another regional style kindred to it. There stand the river-reeds at the back or front doors of its cottages and steadings.

The richness and variety of the regional building I had gathered from previous explorations. Downland Wiltshire, with its flint and brick and the half dozen or more building stones—clunch, sarsen, sandstone, puddingstone and Chilmark stone—experimented in combining them. Her position as the nodal boss of all the cretaceous ranges in England, was the architectural master-influence in chalk of all her neighbours. Yet I had not grasped the full extent of the intimate divergences in technique between valley and valley, yet all within the provincial idiom. The differences in nature between the flow and courses and vegetation of the five rivers had been most sensitively translated into architectural differences. Here was the glory of English building before the standardisation of the Industrial Revolution—the more obediently the masons accepted the limitations of their sites, the richer in character, variety and individuality their buildings. Each valley had its own presiding genius of landscape, each its separate way of manipulating the rock that underlay it. Yet the chalk conditioned a common family likeness between them all.

Thus my journeys for a particular purpose which had nothing

ostensibly to do with landscape had flooded that known scene with a new light. And I am inclined to think that they also illumine a universal principle with which contemporary life is completely out of touch. The pursuit of happiness, of beauty, of self-expression for their own sakes always ends in defeat because it violates this principle. They are all emanations from something else and come unbidden and unsought according to the zeal and power devoted to that something else. In other words, the only way of appreciating landscape at its total values is when it is seen in organic relation to man's life upon and with the earth. The aesthetic sense, some knowledge of earth's history and other qualities are indispensable adjuncts. But they are only adjuncts. The true way to know the earth as a whole is to be in partnership with it. So Wordsworth saw it when he interweaved landscape with human life. This more directly still was how Cobbett saw it. So I, plodding far in their rear, hope to show it in this biography of a Cornishman in Wiltshire.

The following year I paid another visit to Wiltshire, bound upon the same quest. It was then that my conclusions of the previous year bore an even richer harvest than I had hoped. The canvas became larger and at the same time more complex and intimate. I and my fellow-judge travelled much further afield, owing to the extension of flax-growing and incidental offices we had to do. The entries for the competition in flax-ricking were more numerous: in nine days we must have covered near a thousand miles of Wiltshire, Berkshire, Gloucestershire and Somerset. We even penetrated deep into Hampshire, not to judge stacks but appoint ground for flax-growing the following year.

New factors entered and blended into the whole. On my way to Devizes the first day, I broke the journey to revisit the Tithe Barn of Great Coxwell, a mile from Faringdon. Still in use, it was built by the monks of Beaulieu Abbey in the thirteenth century of oak and Cotswold limestone. This, perhaps the vastest (60 yards long) and certainly the most architecturally perfect specimen of a gabled and porched stone barn in Europe and indeed the world, is in complete preservation and judicious repair.

I have known it for many years. Yet, whenever I rest my eyes upon its stone-slatted roof, falling like the slope of Uffington Hill to be seen in the distance, the dim nave and aisles of the interior and the toy stacks and waggons standing beneath the-ordered forest of its timbers that rise from square stone pillars with the mason's marks on them, I receive something I am unable to describe. The only apposite word is confirmation. In this barn I am somehow confirmed in the work I am doing and have done. So powerful are the forces arrayed against it, so frail is the spirit, the instrument, the equipment for perseverance in it that to be fortified by its majesty and tranquillity has become precious to me. In this barn, there is more than the continuity of use maintained over seven centuries. It is a symbol in wood and stone of the fusion between man's daily bread and what is more than bread. Its grandeur and austerity are the final assurance of a universal truth that no age, no civilisation, no human power can break and live. Throughout my journeys, the unity between things of practical purpose and things intangible, expressed in this supreme monument of a wedded beauty and utility, was not only present in my mind but verified.

Agriculture was another element that played its part much more prominently than in the year before. We saw many different sights and scenes. But it was the farm near at hand or a hundred miles away that was the focus of them all. The third new factor within the framework of what I have called in the first section of this chapter the "partnership" between man and the earth, was my fellow-judge in the flax competition, J. E. Hosking, the Director of the Devizes Flax Mill.

I had been with him, the chief judge, the first year, and in my book, *This Plot of Earth*, I gave some account of the extraordinary work he has done. He has established the Devizes Flax Mill as a rural industry in organic contact with the fields and restored a variety of hand-skills in the qualitative processing of the flax. In the second year, I was not only seeing landscape and flax-ricks and farms in his company; I was also seeing him. I was not only seeing him but his former life and experiences and vicissitudes.

Most important of all, a philosophy of life and a means to future action had emerged from them. The interesting thing is that in spirit no less than in fact Hosking's story and reflections were interlaced with my sight-seeing and the practical business

in hand. The man, the scenes, the farms, the competition, our conversations and, last but not least, the great barn, became the features of a coherent and unified composition. What I have been able to make of it is another matter. But I shall relate what happened more or less as it occurred, not detaching one thing from another nor in dwelling upon the parts losing sight of the greater whole. Hosking's life-story is important because, as will appear, it is the story of ourselves as a nation.

On the first day, we went west to Bath and then climbed north upon the Cotswold plateau. The way to Bath was through that borderland of cornbrash, lias, Kimmeridge clay and oolite limestone which makes a rich shuffle of hill and valley. The village of Seend is the gateway from Wiltshire and a delicate register of the geological hugger-mugger below. Half of Seend is built of brick and half of stone, while half-way through the brick walls lining the main street that offers glimpses into mellow backs have stone copings. All the way from Seend to Somerton over the Somerset Poldens, the villages no less than the towns give themselves the dignity of plenty of room, the reason being the good building stone and the prosperity of the mediæval and Tudor cloth trade. The association of ugliness with commerce was yet to come. Commerce had not then abandoned the Natural Law and made of its own lawlessness an "inevitable force." The towns of the region were once as faithful to their rocks as the villages. But most of the stone roofs of Trowbridge, Melksham and Chippenham have now been replaced by Bridgwater pantiles and only Bradford-on-Avon, the terraced town of the clothiers who made urban England without deserting their countrysides, preserves its own identity and so beauty. The prosperity of these towns to-day is precarious and fictitious because it depends not on themselves but an external economics over which they have no control.

After we had inspected a passable utility-stack near Trowbridge, Hosking called my attention to a field across the road. A tractor was ploughing in the stubble. I should not have looked twice but he did, because he had observed that the machine was wheel-slipping. Wheel-slip means soil-panning and winter-souring of it; that is to say, it means waste. But the driver did not notice and there was no old labourer to call the farmer's

attention. Soon no doubt a girl would come into the field with another machine, and she too would know no better. A trifling business—but no, it was not; it was the beginning of a series of revelations not only of the land and its labours but of my fellow-traveller who, like Cobbett, missed nothing.

We moved on to see another rick at the Manor Farm of Tellesford, near the Castle of Farleigh Hungerford which rides on a crest of this deep-valleyed, high-waved country like “a stately ship of Tarsus.” This farm stood in good loam upon a promontory overlooking a wooded cleft of the Frome. It was studded with generous limestone buildings, stackyards, middens, granary, cartsheds; most of the bartons had stout oak doors; huge flagstones led to the farmhouse which stood up on its bluff like a tower. The wood-shed was seen through mullioned windows, the faggots half concealing the flattened pointed arch of a Tudor fireplace. A massive cider-press and cheese-press were lumber in the barn and dairy-house, and leafy timber, almost as old as the farm, made gateways, porches and screens to it on every side. It must always have been a remote place. But what an impression it gave of an intense and robust and spacious husbandry long overpast, yet once crowning a wild nature all about it with strong directive purpose!

The farmer lived in the shadow of a former greatness and his farm was divided between two worlds. One, self-helping, had left the marks of its solidity, permanence and customary traffic with the seasons upon the buildings. The other, mass-producing money-crops in war and scraping a living out of milk in peace, was subject to every wind that blew hot or cold from the distant city. The farmer said to us, as we took a tot of gin with him in the farmhouse, “Tisn’t they who scabble and tear as does the work.” It might have been a comment on the tractor that was wasting its power and binding the soil.

This land is part of the Holy Land of Somerset. It is rich in legends of saints and hermits of “the hairy gown and mossy cell” retired from the world, clustered with the towers and fanes of holy places. So in the past I have thought Bath incongruous with the Gothic heritage of Somerset. But approach it from the ridge of the Avon Valley where Fairford, Limpley Stoke and Claverton hang from it like crab-apples from a twig, and it is like a formal water-lily resting on the long leaves of its hills. This noble

concourse of hills throwing out convergent tongues of land, each crowned with its Celtic citadel, prepared the way for Bath. The order of its crescents and terraces is studied, even self-conscious; it lacks the Gothic genius of spontaneous unison with nature. But it is the order of precision and method responding to the deeper order of the ageless earth. These two orders equally confront the disorder of the suburbs, reflecting the loss of contact with the land equally with every canon of seemliness and proportion. Suburbs everywhere are a picture of society in dissolution, without roots or guiding principles. They are allied with certain aspects of modern farming with which I became painfully acquainted.

The same curvilinear sweep of long spurs, moving to a common meeting-place in Bath, is seen on the Gloucester Road north of the city. They are fingers of the central Cotswold palm, the great plateau, one of whose broadest scapes is from Littleton Down. So wide is the range of sight that the Downs above Swindon can be viewed from it like an anchored cloud-bank. But west the grey buttressed Tower of Pucklechurch closes the horizon. It was one of the many towers that dominated our stopping places and, as I come to see now, indirectly our talks and thoughts. On Littleton Down there was an assemblage of no fewer than 25 flax-ricks, the harvest of a monster field of 169 acres cultivated by the War Committee which had ploughed up the old common. This must have been a sight unique in England that only six years ago contained not half a score in the whole kingdom. We hesitated as to whether these ricks should or should not be "highly commended." But what Leland would have called their "uplandish" position decided the issue for us. When we returned some days later, it was to find that the winds had pulled the straws of the dry thatching apart and were busily disintegrating it.

III

It was here, looking over this wind-gallop Down in the tempered rays of the September sunshine, that Hosking told me the story of his father's farm a quarter of a century ago within the arm of a Cornish river. The ancestral home was Bineton Manor but his father, being one of a numerous family, had found

his home here. Some 500 choice acres in extent, it was managed, like most farms of that period and like no big farm to-day, on the rotational system of a mixed and self-sufficient economy. Nothing was exported off the farm except butter (which contains no minerals and does not rob it), cattle and sheep which were replaced by others and wheat. The export of butter from a farm differs from that of milk whose minerals "draw" the soil because its components are converted energy from air, sunshine and moisture. The wheat was winnowed before sale, a practice now almost obsolete, and this provided a high proportion of screenings, never sold, for the chickens and geese. The separated milk was fed to the pigs with barley meal off the farm. Being entirely home-fed, they were never attacked by swine-fever. These pigs furthered the economy of self-support in another direction. They were Large Blacks, the docile grazing pig that ranges freely without the need of fences and can be traced back for many years in the Herd Book. Since nothing but surpluses were exported, a little linseed cake was the only import. The cultivations were done by 15 or 16 horses—7 or 8 teams—and they in their turn were fed and the young stock with them on hay, roots, good oat-straw and oats grown in the home-fields and crushed on the spot.

Hosking's father was one of the early keepers of Hereford beef-stock and breeders of South Devons, grass-fed for both beef and milk. How this West Country stock flourished on this West Country farm may be indicated by the fact that Hosking the elder held the world's record for a South Devon bull of more than thirty hundredweights. A stock-bull of the herd weighed, when sold after some years on the land, over 28 cwts. liveweight and made 66s. per cwt. liveweight in the Christmas market. These Devons, very different from specialised milk-machines like Friesians, provided just enough milk and cream for the household, for the pigs and for rearing calves. Many of them gave milk of as high as 6.6 per cent butter fat and some of the yields were $4\frac{1}{2}$ gallons daily, *not for sale but butter-making*. *With the addition of their grazing services and stamping the straw in the winter, they played an indispensable part in supporting the farm and maintaining its interlocked economy.*

The young stock were kept in loose boxes open to the yards. Each cow reared four or five calves a year, two calves being

allotted to each cow while the herd was stalled. It thus made a further contribution to the pattern of self-help by, as it were, building up itself and securing a continuity of stock free of disease, secure from the fluctuations of finance and independent of the markets. Father Hosking never went to market to buy livestock and, if a new bull was required, it was penned for a time in an isolation box. The pigs being in two herds, it was not even necessary for him to buy a boar. The consequence was that his veterinary bills were negligible, and the South Devon breed, being home-bred, home-fed and unstuffed with foreign concentrates, has retained its stamina to this day.

As there were two herds of pigs, so two flocks of sheep which suited the lambing rotation. One of these was also South Devons (longwools), South Hams as they were called, the other Oxford Downs, both sheep that made the big joints of ampler days. If this yeoman had been told by the then Board of Agriculture that it disapproved of the hurdled flock, as the present Ministry does, he would have laughed. He rounded off this abundance and variety of livestock by keeping heavy flocks of geese and poultry, the latter good crossbreds of the old Plymouth Rock, now vanished, Leghorns and Buff Orpingtons. They were run over all the stubbles, the sheep on the oat stubble only, a constant insurance of their stamina.

The farm pursued the established Norfolk four-course rotation. It was Coke of Norfolk's own and is *the* rotation for self-sufficiency—wheat, roots for cleaning and winter feeding, oats, dredge corn or barley and seeding out for clover. This of course hinged upon the fertility rotation—dung to crops, crops to livestock and dung back again to crops. The clover was the indigenous strain of Cornish red marl and the very best for that reason. It was seeded down with rye-grass, timothy, meadow fescue, poas, one lb. of sheep's parsley, a pinch of yarrow, a little trefoil, marl clover and white clover. Though Sir George Stapledon has done wonders for our grasses, it is clear from this inventory how much *greater was the variety of seeds mixtures sown down by our fathers*, one well suited to that of the livestock. In both we have worked towards standardisation and over-simplification. But then the practice of our fathers was based on observation in the field, not on analysis in the laboratory, and what they observed was the relish of livestock for a variety of foods.

What the young Hosking remembered to this day was how ravenous the cattle and horses were for cow parsnip in the hedgerows when they left the stalls and stone-built covered yards after the winter. They took full advantage of the bounteous supply of herbs the hedges furnished them. It could only have been the fatality of the modern experiment in stockless farming that could have initiated the policy, just as blind, of uprooting our hedges. The way his father managed his hedges neatly illustrates their organic relation to his rotational husbandry. He followed an economy of hedges and ricks, ricks and hedges that dovetailed almost as closely as sheep and roots. The hedges were cleaned and trimmed every year according to the rotation and before the cultivation of a particular field. The hedgers came in while the field, grassed and sheeped, was being ploughed for autumn wheat and before the binder came on the scene. The top and lop went to the hedgers while the brambles made a footing for the stacks. The trimming had the further advantage of destroying the insect vermin which hedges harbour. This hedge economy deterred the rats and aerated the stacks.

The larger rotation of the seasons governed in other ways this lesser rhythm of cropping. One of the flaws in mechanised and cash farming is that in wet or adverse weather the hands have little or nothing to do. The winter yard has become obsolete and a machine has been invented to make a thatch-mat, even if a very poor one. But on the paternal farm there was a host of jobs on the fieldless days which prepared for the fields—cleaning out the yards, making spicks and straw bonds, grinding corn, slicing roots, throwing out dung to the mixen, feeding and cleaning stock and others. The thatch was always made ready in the winter months for the next year's harvest. One job was to remove the combed reed off the wheat-ricks at threshing time and thatch the straw-ricks with it. Even the roads took part in the farm-economy. The road sweepings and scrapings were collected for the manure heaps, a practice impossible to-day because of the tar. We do not know what to do to-day with the riches of the wayside and so we burn them. On our long drives we saw men employed to do it.

The folding system was more intensive for the fields furthest from the farm in order to save dung for the nearer. The only inorganic manure in use were phosphates for the roots and for

the same purpose as Mr. Henderson¹ now uses them. If at any time Father Hosking exported more cattle than were replaced, he imported his phosphates as bone manure. The rotation was in fact a miniature of the "wheel of life," and the cropping decisions were inevitably based on it. The market was an irrelevance, and what preoccupied the husbandman had nothing to do with buying and selling; it was the right and wrong times for doing things. Literally the last thing he thought about was money. The problem of money automatically righted itself if what came before it, the self-supporting husbandry, was in working order. Even his labourers hardly thought about the wage he paid them, fifteen shillings a week, outrageous by our standards. But our standards are no criterion to go by. They ignore the difference in the value of money between then and now and the fact that on this farm as on all traditional ones payment was substantially in kind. The labourers all had good gardens and farmyard manure was provided for them. Their potato grounds were stocked for them; they received their separated milk, their rabbits and other perquisites free.

The iniquity of the wage was not so much in its amount as its incidence; it was uniform for married men as for bachelors; for men with large families as for small. The injustice lay in the lack of relative scale. But before we condemn *tout court*, we have to think ourselves back into a farm-economy where little cash was handled. Physical toil was calculated primarily in terms of skill and obligation to the land and the farm and only secondarily in terms of £ s. d. The social bond between the farmer and his men had not yet been severed by the supremacy of cash values. On this Cornish farm men were lifting sacks all day long for a paltry wage; in the era of cash-cropping, the factory-farm and high wages, they can hardly lift them at all. Again, fifteen shillings a week was half as much again as the labourers were getting before Joseph Arch founded the Agricultural Workers' Union in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. But it is a great mistake to assume, as is so often done, that the raising of the wage was the main purpose of that hero's crusade. Both he and Cobbett before him hitched their waggons to a particular star—the restoration of the peasantry. None of the labourers on the Cornish farm were a proletariat because none of them were landless.

¹ See p. 184.

We have to think ourselves back into a period when agriculture was a self-sufficient economy. Nothing paid on the Hosking farm and yet everything paid. The antipathy between that economy and one measured purely in money has come to a head in the destruction not only of the self-supporting farm but of self-help in every channel of life. On the farm in Cornwall, whose husbandry would not and could not fit into modern finance, the collision came from the need of capital expenditure in setting up a family of five sons. At this crucial point the farm came into contact with the world without, whose hostility to the traditional England was becoming more and more pronounced. The feet of the son, my friend, set out upon a course remote from that of his early life at home, and yet with but half a heart for new ways alien to his heritage. But his emergence by trial and error from these ways sent him home again in spirit. It was this that gave him the urge to tell me the story of his father, of himself and of his final resolution to find what he calls "the road back."

Young Hosking was brought up in something more than the "agricultural righteousness" of a little agricultural commonwealth. He absorbed an atmosphere. What he remembered most vividly of his father's qualities was his serenity; he was a man slow to anger and of great forbearance. I was struck with this, for, the day before, on my way to Devizes, I had called on another particular friend, a great surgeon who, like Hosking himself, had found "the road back." He spoke as we parted of an "inward tranquillity" as the prize of life. This serenity, guiding the slow infallible rhythms of farm life, had permeated the life of the man beside me, eating our Cornish pasties on Littleton Down. It was a quietness made the more secure by the farm lying in the fork of the river and in the midst of a still inviolate countryside where cork and eucalyptus trees grew among the native hardwoods, reaching from 120-150 feet high. The scene of his boyhood was as remote from the disquietude of pavements as Cowper's "boundless contiguity of shade."

Hosking's own unhurried ways and speech, his essential quietism, were the more eloquent from his constant references to the worried strained expression and excitability of the modern business farmer, conspicuous enough in Wiltshire to-day. The farm, he would often say, disciplines the good husbandman; the modern factory-farmer tries to discipline his farm. Of course he

can't do it and this is what gives him his air of stress and tension. Hustlers, "straining every nerve" to be "abreast of the times" are self-confessed neurotics. It is not the winner, but the loser, the traditional farmer, in this furious world of pace, pressure, push, mass-production and profit, who possesses himself in calm of mind.

The spell of time-saving and frittering it away when saved had not woven a circle round the farm in Cornwall. Time was well spent in special attentions to crop and beast, in cocking the hay and hutting the corn, in concern for a weedy crop and what the neighbours might say about it. The modern habit of flopping the soil over flat in ploughing so that the weeds are only half covered would have been a scandal in every man's mouth. Teams-men would "waste" time in comparing teams farm by farm, and within this slower tempo there was time to think, to see, to smell. Smell is one of the five senses that now is well on its way to atrophy:

"They haven't got no noses,
They haven't got no noses,
And goodness only knowses
The Noselessness of Man."

But Hosking remembered seeing old teamsmen pick up newly turned soil and smell it with something of W. H. Hudson's exhilaration in the scents of earth. The tractor has outmoded all this, as it has the ploughman's acuity of sense of the soil underneath no less than upon the surface. He told me that the spring call of the cock pheasant still brings to his memory the cultivation of the newly sprouting spring corn and to his nostrils the scent of the bluebells. And that with his inward eye he can still see the myriads of insects and bees clinging to the clover topple over, intoxicated with its nectar as the knife laid it in swathes. The landsmen of those days thought of saving the harvest, not time. That a *bank* holiday should interrupt it and a trades union have the power to insist on it would have seemed to them, as indeed it was, a cracking of the heart of things.

With such influences the man beside me grew up. The inset rhythms and tranquillity of the farm and its director, the larger rhythms and slow tread of the seasons, like the plough-oxen of

his father's father, conditioned his whole life. Through them his father had lived till he was eighty-seven and, having hardly ailed, died in a doze. Through them and this traditional background he became saturated in those natural associations and persuasions which the farm translated into the language of husbandry. One of the primary requisites for a good flax-rick is that it should be well bottomed, the best foundation of all being faggots overlaid with straw. So had it been with his own boyhood.

From the random talks of our journeys, in which one thing was always leading to another and the scenes we passed enriched them with memory and reflection, I picked out three elements of education which had especially nourished those formative years. For he had taken a full share in the farm activities and could do them all, some better than others. It had been his father's practice to send one son to work with the men when they were performing a group-job. One of these influences had been his feeling for variety. Learning to plough when he was twelve years old, he had noted the differences between wild and cultivated crops year by year and that he had never seen two crops alike in the same district from one year to another. Plough coulter and shares to-day are mass-produced from a factory, thus making more work for the ploughman. But in his young days the blacksmith shaped each share and coulter according to the nature of the soil and the lie of the land it was to break. For each field requires both share and coulter set differently for different fields and the blacksmith knew the fields. Here was a true saving of labour. Herds and flocks built up on the farm and seldom marketed meant that the individual characteristics of each animal were observed.

Another training was in health as part of wholeness. The rarity of disease at home and on the farm made him in later years acutely conscious of the obsession with it in modern "scientific" agriculture. The self-reliance of the home-farm made it independent of all the preventive and curative paraphernalia which have separated health from a way of life, lost it and been content with patching and propping. The health of the farm meant the health of the homestead that with the animals fed upon it. The buttermilk went to the pigs like the rest of the separated milk but also to the making of scones. The bread was made from the corn in the home-fields ground by the family miller and baked

in the oven, a dozen cottage loaves at a time, each one a miniature of Old Sarum. It was the interlocked and local autarky of the farm that gave this wholeness.

The third influence was a love of all living things, plants and animals and the natural scene. Trees in particular were to Hosking part of the self-supporting community. He thought of the long and laborious life of the tree, slowly gathering strength, climbing higher and higher and yet felled in an hour. We no longer plant oaks, he said, because there is no financial return on them. Yet, because our forefathers thought differently, we have been supplied gratis with the timber for two world-wars. Blind to its beauty, we are exploiting its utility, indifferent to a future when both will be lost. For the priceless gift of the home-farm was a perception that has given him the power to emerge from a life away from it fatal to a lesser man. It was the perception, developed by the experience of its opposite, that the practical and the intangible could only be divided the one from the other to the sacrifice of both.

IV

On our subsequent journeys, I came to realise that the story of the Cornish farm was the key to the whole countryside. The farm represented an allegiance to certain principles, and what we saw over hundreds of miles was either a series of local versions of them or a flat contradiction of them or a transitional stage between the two. The succession of pictures passing as in a film across the screen blended with Hosking's own observations, with the object of our travels and with a question in my own mind. In what particular way did Chapter II of his life, after he had turned his back on his home, differ from Chapter I? I was content to wait for the answer. In the meantime, I was noticing various phases of country life thrown on the screen which carried me from Chapter I to Chapter II before I had heard the latter from his own lips.

We travelled twice far and wide over the open and rather melancholy country of the south-western Cotswolds west of Malmesbury, north of Bristol and south of Thornbury. First, we went to see a rick in the Severn Valley and then another in the

Duke of Beaufort's park at Badminton. Perhaps this country has suffered from being only on the edge of the Cotswold tradition and from its closeness to the coal-bearing region by Bristol. The small towns, Yate, Iron Acton, the Sodburies and others, are active enough and yet are invested with an indescribable air of decay. The rich and unusual Cross at Iron Acton, the ogee curve of the main street at Chipping Sodbury seemed relics of a past inconceivably remote. How many of our market towns and villages have these lovely curves in their high streets? Chipping Campden, Castle Combe, Burford, Sherborne, Painswick, Thame, Malmesbury, Ledbury, Ludlow, Lyme Regis, Marlborough, Bourton-on-the-Water.

All the way in the country we saw more gates open than shut, more gates that could not be shut than could, more gates broken than whole, tousled heaps of straw by the stacks, dishevelled combined fields, stacks growing out, tumbled or gaping drystone walls, ivy-covered trees, indifferently ploughed fields, weedy pastures, dilapidated farm buildings, even barbed wire sagging or twisted. Escaping the May frosts on the high plateau, the apple-trees had presented a bumper crop to graceless man; while Britain is being supplied with Canadian apples, our own lay rotting on the ground or trees or, the cookers and eaters, were being used for cider.

Thistles and thorns abounded on the pastures and tons of wood sprawled about in the coppices. Part of this dereliction may have been due to the absentee pluralist farming (one man running several farms at a distance from one another), which is prevalent over parts of the Cotswolds and quite unchecked by the War Committee. Except for the ploughland, immeasurably inferior to the barley "lands" I had seen fifteen years before, the Cotswolds looked as I had seen them just before the War, a great country with a great tradition in ruins. Though tens of thousands of acres had been dragged from wasteland to cornland, the countryside was as empty as ever. In some mysterious way the wilderness had become bountiful without ceasing to be wilderness. It was a paradox of decay and plenty. A dying man had risen from his bed, not made whole but dying still.

The flax-rick in Badminton Park got third prize. It might have done better if the flax-straw had not been banged like butter to make a tidy effect. In a flax-rick it is the straw that counts,

not, as in a corn-rick, the grain. But plenty of wheat-straw had been used on the roof and there was a pronounced ridge. It was well-bottomed with straw (though not faggots) and the whole was well proportioned and guarded against the weather. If a rick has a good appearance, you may be sure it has served its purpose, which is not ornamental at all. Yet this fairly craftsman-like rick did not look happy with the Park, which had itself passed over from the ornamental to the productive. A great deal of the handsome timber had been felled. But the sacrifice had not prevented much wastage of wood which lay about with none to make use of it. Huge sprawling fields had been carved out without the smallest order or adjustment to the scene. They had been combined and you can always tell where the combine-harvester has been by other signs than the absence of ricks. The whole looked as though a brutal utilitarianism had broken in and impatiently started mass-producing. If anything got in the way, out with it or down with it. Was it a sign that, if you break the cycle of a self-supporting husbandry, even if only in one place, the whole structure of farming falls to pieces? To try and replace it by expediency is like stopping a leak with a piece of paper.

The same note was struck, though in a different way, when to see another rick we visited a farm in the Severn Valley. It was at Itchington on the Triassic red marls whose texture is not dissimilar from the Cotswold brash, though they go down much deeper. As on Cotswold, the buildings were of stone. But a more significant likeness were their spaciousness and largeness of conception. The cow-stalls, for instance, were entered by a row of broad rounded arches, like a Norman arcade, and giving easy access to the midden. It is impossible to do a round of the farms in the West Country without being struck by the generosity and stateliness of their buildings. They represent farming in the grand style and nearly always they are now, as it were, in rags. Their farmers have usually emerged from the between-wars tribulation with the marks of it bitten deep into them. They have no expectations of the future and regard this fleeting prosperity of the present with a certain irony and detachment. They are like a patient man with a flighty wife who deserted him, ruined him, has returned to him in her adversity but is ready at any favourable moment to bolt again with a rich lover.

This one was in his eightieth year but still with his two sons

taking an active part in the farm-management. His farm, being low-lying, had been taken in hand by the Catchment or Drainage Board and he was worried by the mess it had made of his brook. He took us half a mile through his fields to the flax-rick. It was good but not quite good enough, though of combed reed and embellished by the comely West County fashion of girdling the roof with twisted straw bonds. Near at hand was the brook, and we witnessed what had happened to thousands of its like over the length and breadth of England. First, the withies that hold the banks are cut, not all but too many of them; then the excavator lowers the bed, speeds up the flow, takes the water off too quickly and dumps the mud that becomes a hotbed for germinating weed-seeds on the bank. We saw precisely the same thing over miles of the Sedgmoor rhines and I have described in Chapter VIII¹ what has happened to the Herefordshire Lugg. The impression was strong of an old and stable order disrupted. For this once distinguished farm must at one time have followed the same laws as the farm on the Cornish river.

Here was the man beside me who had been educated on that farm. He was now a full man not only in his prime but enriched both by what he had learned at his father's steading and by what he had had to unlearn in his subsequent career away from it. The unlearning had been as potent a force as the learning. But it was through what he had learned that he had acquired the strength and wisdom to unlearn. It is the same with others who are feeling their way by a different way through a civilisation in a spiritual ruin as patent as the physical ruin of the great Cotswold culture. But the earth is primary, and this is what makes Hosking's history important.

I gathered something of that blended experience from the talk in the farmhouse where we took an ample tea with the farmer. It was of the varieties of wheats: what wheats were fitted to what soils, what resisted disease and what not and what were the peculiarities of each strain. The company listened to Hosking almost with awe, though they were wheat-growers of discrimination. He went far beyond his hearers not only in the breadth and intimacy of his knowledge but in the stress he laid upon the effects for human nutrition in growing the right wheat in the right soil. His "ecological" concept of the integration of plant and soil was

¹ See p. 159.

a scientific one. But it was derived from what he had observed on his father's farm.

Hosking is now the Chairman of the National Institute of Agricultural Botany. In the very year which saw us at this farm in Severn Vale, it had eliminated from the list of recommended varieties of seed wheat those foreign strains whose import, together with the lack of husbandry in cultivating them and of humus in feeding them, has landed us with a host of diseases. The Institute is for such sturdy and indigenous strains (16 only) as Holdfast, Redman, Yeoman, Steadfast, Rampton Rivet and Little Joss, traditional wheats whose very names symbolise their validity. In this stroke on behalf of our home-wheats I could trace the influence of the home-farm in Cornwall.

The rick that got second prize was on the high ground above Camerton, north of the Somerset coal region at Radstock. It was notable how much indifferent stacking we saw, though it was better than the year before. One was trimmed, the cardinal sin against flax, the whole of whose straw, roots and all, must be preserved intact. Another (in Wiltshire) had its thatch growing out because the sheaves had^a been pushed too fast through the threshing drum. Others were over-paddled; some were architecturally amateurish with well-thatched roofs, others the reverse. One had humped roof-angles, another would be ridgeless, another innocent of how to spring (i.e. recess or taper) the floor from the eaves of the stem.

Wiltshire, once the node of high craftsmanship for all the neighbouring counties, was comfortably inferior to all of them we visited. They were a striking example of what preoccupied Hosking in his talks with me on our long journeys—how to find “the road back” to craftsmanship and a true husbandry. The flax-ricks scattered over the countryside were fumblingly attempting that very thing. But the ricks (there were three of them) at Camerton had achieved it; from their eminence overlooking that ancient land, whose dells and folds conceal so much ruined beauty evoked from man once in harmony with nature, they proclaimed it. The more refreshingly to us who had emerged from the mining villages where even the Bath stone is forced into mean and ugly shapes strangely at variance with the pretentious front doors.

The ricks were small and round, each crowned with a simple

finial at the apex and zoned with pegged straw bonds, each at the right distance from the other. They were finely sprung and the grace of this manner of building is at one (as in all true craftsmanship) with its utility. The eaves projecting well over the stem, the combed reed (red wheat), the finish of the whole announced the same unity. These ricks were surrounded by others of wheat, as elegant, and the groups made a composition of tranquil care and industry in contrast with others on the further fork of the ridge across the valley, whose farmer had been modern enough to be in a hurry. A little further on, the noble tower of Bathford Church with its elongated stair-turret commands the Avon Valley. The sign I had just seen of a feeling back towards good workmanship must, if it prevails in the end against the pressure of the age, find its way likewise to those first principles which that tower declared. In the Tithe Barn of Great Coxwell, both were made one.

On our way home from this expedition, we passed a tractor pulling a cultivator and a harrow. The theory was that the driver was doing a double job in one and so "saving labour." What he was really doing was halving the efficiency (in the older sense of the term before it came to mean costings and profit), because each implement was performing about half of what it should have done. This started Hosking off on a series of reflections about the machine in modern agriculture. Though they covered several days of many miles, I conveniently string them together here as a prelude to the second part of his biography. He attacked it on grounds that, to the best of my knowledge, have never yet been properly ventilated and are the very reverse of "sentimental" ones. Namely, that it introduces into farming certain elements detrimental to a good, that is to say, practical, husbandry.

First, it produces certain harmful effects upon the driver himself. The most obvious of these are gastric ulcers, the consequence as much of the sitting position and its effect in cramping the stomach as of bad food. Sensorily, its fumes dull the sense of smell, a faculty to which Hosking attached much importance. Psychologically, it induces laziness. The tractor-driver despises the hard work of the older countryman and soon, my friend said tartly, he will need an elevator to lift him on his seat. I was reminded of Chesterton's lines on Mr. Mandragon, the millionaire:

"Besides a dandy little machine,
 Cunning and neat as ever was seen,
 With a hundred pulleys and cranks between,
 Made of metal and kept quite clean,
 To hoist him out of his healthful bed, every day of his life,
 And wash him and brush him and shave him and dress him to
 live the Simple Life."

The laziness in its turn fosters neglect, so that the work of ploughing is nearly always scamped, the furrows badly turned and the plough badly set. Mechanisation, in fact, had supplanted quality. But since quality cannot be assessed in figures, it is not realised to-day what has been lost.

Hosking was equally pioneering in comparing the tractor with the horse. In former days were to be seen well-groomed horses on a well-groomed farm and the carter himself well dressed in his leather and corduroys. But on the mechanised farm these added cares were superfluities. If the machine goes wrong, it is the outside mechanic who puts it right ; if the horse ailed, it was the responsibility of the carter. Genuine improvement of tools can only come from those who use them. A man says—now I have a tractor, I keep two cows instead of one horse. But actually he has two exporting units for a single self-sufficient one. The cows in exporting the minerals in milk are "exporting the farm," while the horse in his labour, his manure and ultimately his bones is rendering back to the farm what he takes from it. For the tractor everything is imported, none of which goes back as residual fertility. But since the tractor can be costed to a penny but not the horse, the machine can be made to look more efficient. So, if the farm is mechanised, it is called a good one. This was a point he often canvassed—the indebtedness of the machine to external sources, the horse's being only his shoes, and only those for use on the roads. The horse dovetailed into the farm-economy as the tractor could never do.

The advantage of the horse-ploughman walking behind his implement was that his foot trod on the earth just turned. But how can a tractor-driver see what is happening behind him? The petrol-engine is used by the engineer-farmer as a matter of course, while the farmer-engineer calls it in only on an emergency such as lack of labour. Again, to cultivate the land needs apprentice-

ship and the term is meaningless for the tractor. Is there the same love for the animal as in the days of the horse? It is replaced only by a liking for the machine. The business farmer puts the name of his cow on a plaque in the stall for showmanship. But Molly's homely cowman has no need to remind himself of her name.

These criticisms from a man who was one of the first in England to drive a tractor were spiced by what we saw of the work of the combine in Wiltshire. No fewer than a hundred were imported into the county in 1944. Even in the downland or wold areas of the other counties we visited together, suitable for what might be called its ravages, there were nothing like so many. In one field we passed between Marlborough and Devizes the combine had driven over and crushed the wheat-sheaves on an adjoining piece tied by a binder. A reprimand by the cultivation officer was answered by "But we couldn't stop the machine." So far have we travelled from what was uttered two thousand years ago. The land is for the machine and not the machine for the land. So much so that Hosking, a man least given of any I know to explosive statement, remarked to me that those who were suffering from our bondage to automatism but feared to speak their revolt were like the French *maquis* waiting underground for the word of deliverance.

There were three infallible means of identifying at sight the brand of the combine on the September fields of Wiltshire, which looked to me like a vast empty camp of stockless mechanised farmers. One was by the policy of scorched earth, namely by burning the straw after it. The second was by the broad striping of green lanes along the entire length or breadth of a stubble-field; these were where the grain dropped by the machine had sprouted. I learned from Hosking after I had returned home that he had observed the same phenomenon in Oxon, Bucks, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. The third was by the *farouche* appearance of the field itself.

To take the last first, I have never in all my wanderings for thirty years over the face of England seen cornfields like those of 1944 in Wiltshire, one of the most progressive and highly mechanised agricultural counties in England. Here is an example, one of scores. The field was a large hedgeless one and looked as though the troop of Bacchantes in Keats's poem had charged madly into it, trampling down the straw in the ecstasy of the

vine and biting off the ears. It is said that one advantage of a combined field is that it makes good cover for partridges; here, as one member of our party remarked, was good cover for a rhinoceros.

Parting with some effort the tangled clumps of straw, we could see the hard ground strewn with countless grain and weed-seeds. On the edge of the field stood a caterpillar tractor ticking over and attached to a five-furrow plough. So the ploughman told us (and he had had 18 years' experience of ploughs). We had to take him at his word because most of the plough and all of the shares were invisible. They were wrapped up in straw as though the plough had come by post in a straw packing, and the ploughman was busy with a pitchfork unpacking it. It had been impossible to burn the straw because there was an ammunition dump close by.

Elsewhere, there were no such obstacles. One of the purest landscapes and richest greensand soils in England is the edge of the Vale of Pewsey between Alton Priors and Allington, backed by the long line and masterly modelling in col, headland and saddle-back of the Marlborough Downs. The very cottages of timber, brick and stone respond to the simple and economised grandeur of the natural composition by touches of special elegance—curved struts, rhythmical sweep of thatch and tile-headed oriel windows. The distant spire of Bishops Cannings Church serenely clears its ramp of trees. Another religion as organically impresses itself upon the landscape. The long barrow of Adam's Grave forms one slope of a green conical mound and below it the land falls away to a wide terrace supported by flying buttresses on two sides. The natural takes the form of man-made architecture, the man-made had conformed to but enhanced the natural design. Lofty Tan Hill directly opposite held memories of the great sheep-fairs thereon, stressing the particularity of this place as great in husbandry as in beauty.

But now the land was sheepless and stockless, while the green symmetry of the flowing Downs confronted a black smudge, an area of burnt-out desolation. For to burn the straw gives a saving of 3s. 6d. per acre of cost. A short time before, it had been a barley field, as we could tell by the strips of green made by the self-sown grain and the myriads of kernels lying on the ground, each one with a black spot on it from the burning of the straw.

The disgrace of this field was dramatised by the grace of its setting.

It is said of those who advocate the cultivation of the earth by good husbandry that they are "warped by nostalgia" and "cramped by traditionalism," that in their desire to "keep farming free of all taint of commercialism and industrialism," they "grope about in a sort of mediæval twilight towards a mystical state of which the symbols are the maypole and the night-soil cart." The remedy, it is argued, for this mystical mugwumperry is the "rationalisation" and "standardisation" of "the agricultural industry" in the interests (*viz.*: the vested interests) of international trade. Food is not grown to satisfy people's needs but mass-produced as a factor in the exchange-value of competing for a favourable trade balance. Here was this "rationalised" (*viz.*: labourless) farming in visible action or what has been called "combine and matches" farming. On the Downs above us, the Bronze Age colonists of Avebury had cultivated barley with the digging stick. And this primitive scratching was superior farming practice to what I saw below the Downs 2000 years later.

The truth is, as Hosking put it as an appendage to his comments on the tractor, that the combine cannot take crops too good for it. It is simply a method by which the inferior farmer with thin crops can beat the good one with heavy ones by cheapening the process. He compared the combine farmer with a roundsman who buys a faster car to do a quicker round and so sell more goods. It is a process impossible with horse-farming or spade-cultivation because the only difference there is in the quality of the work. If the combine were improved in an attempt to stem the waste, it would become even more cumbersome and unmanageable than it is already. Its only advantage in that it allows the grain to ripen in the standing ear; its only excusable use is for short-stemmed barley and we had seen what that was like under Tan Hill. The potash from the ashes is the merest short-term stop-gap against the drain of fertility.

Mechanisation of the land has, in fact, been adopted to fit into a modern economics based on a purely quantitative production. Yet, as we had seen it, it had defeated its own short-sighted ends. "The folds shall be full of sheep; the valleys also shall stand so thick with corn that they shall laugh and sing." But not by power-farming and "efficiency." If the modern combine-farmer

answered his critics in some such terms as these: "combine farming is unquestionably wasteful both in grain and in straw; it is using up fertility because the chemical bag is the only fertilizer to replace the drain on organic plant-foods; it is expediency farming. But we cannot help it. Nearly all our labour has been taken from us; our livestock has been depleted by a bad policy, and good husbandry, through no fault of our own, has been at a discount"—if such were his plea, the edge of criticism would be turned. But what he actually does say is that he must "move with the times," as though the waste and expedience were not only inevitable now but part of a future "prosperity." Thus he allies himself to a mentality which thinks of human beings as "mobile males," "immobile females," "dilutees" or just "bodies." He becomes the victim of a habit of mind caricatured in the following, taken from the pages of a farming journal:

"Mechanisation of farming has, to a large extent, stopped short at replacing the horse. There are still more farm employees working with their arms and legs than there are on tractors, and this is likely to be uneconomic in future."

Unfortunately, the natives of this armless and legless Utopia will, by such farming methods, have nothing to eat.

CHAPTER XI

A CORNISHMAN IN WILTSHIRE—II

“But when we in our viciousness grow hard,—
O misery on 't—the wise gods seal our eyes ;
In our own filth drop our clear judgments ; make us
Adore our errors ; laugh at 's while we strut
To our confusion.”

Antony and Cleopatra.

WHEN I talked chemicals and tractors to my father, said Hosking rather ruefully as we drove among the Downs, I was called unpractical; now that I talk against their abuse, I am still called unpractical. Before the first phase of the war period, he had been urging some compliance with “progress” upon his father who had five sons to place out in the world. Even so, it took the old man some years to be moved, not from what the modern calls a stubborn obscurantism but his intuitive sense of what he believed to be right. It was his son, not he, who took the line of least resistance. Being young, Hosking had caught the infection of a pace-making system entirely hostile to a self-supporting farm-economy. The opportunities in agriculture were becoming fewer and fewer, as society became more and more urban, and the skilled workers were flocking into the towns where they or their sons were to become either unskilled at the machine or workless on the dole. The first world war completed the parting of the ways, and, being one of the younger sons, he enlisted. He was absent till the pseudo-peace released him. Accepting the odds against his father's type of farming and suspecting that agriculture would be betrayed as soon as the cheap-food ships could get under weigh, he joined the business of his uncle, a miller-farmer, in the region of Okehampton.

It was on the uplands looking down on Mells, near which we had been to see another rick, that he told me the outlines of the second phase in his working life. Mells has poignant memories

for me from my own earlier life. I looked down into that enchanted combe, so rich in trees, in the dove-coloured grace of the Horner mansion and the Somerset tower beside it. The secluded cottages were scattered like flowers in grass among its leafy slopes, and by the waterfall behind its merry stream where the dipper used to nest. Mells seemed to be an emblem of what Hosking, like our whole nation, had left behind.

On his father's side he came of a line of landowner-farmers, seamen and parsons. It was from his mother's side that the milling tradition was inherited. Her father had plied his own steamboat with its brass funnel on the same Cornish river in whose crook stood the parental farm. It carried the wheats which were loaded from the boat for the mill on horse-waggons and in those spacious days there were 17 of them. This countryman too lived beyond the three-score years and ten, and rode his horse up to a few days before his death. His son, the brother of Hosking's mother, maintained the family vigour and independence as well as the milling business. He had three mills, was four times mayor of his town and had insisted on addressing a hostile mob from his steam-waggon.

But in the middle of the nineteen twenties, both the Devonshire mill and the two family country mills in Cornwall, were bought out by the milling combine, then in the thick of its campaign for putting the country stone-grinding mills out of action and so striking a mortal blow at the heart of the localised rural community. It was abetted by Government who passed the paralyzing law to veto the local farmer from selling bread-corn to the local miller. It was not because these local mills were "uneconomic," that they were struck down. The costs were as low as the combine's. But the stone-mills were smothered by the underselling of surpluses and the erection of temporary plant in the district. Long before the twenties, his uncle had migrated into Devonshire. There the nephew after his war-service joined him in the milling of flour and grist, in the merchanting of seeds, wool and fertilizer and in the farming of some 300 acres on the edge of Dartmoor.

So short a step, so minute a change—from Cornwall to Devon, from father to uncle, from a farm that was just a farm to a farm with a mill. Actually, it was a giant stride from world to world, the stride of one century that our nation took after the Industrial

Revolution from a rural civilisation into industrialism. For Hosking passed at one bound from self-subsistent production to mercantilism, from growing and conserving things to buying and selling them. The wrench was self-confessed in his telling me that he used to drive 65 miles from Okehampton to the Cornish farm but stopped four miles away from it. He knew that, if he had added this fraction to his milage, he would not have been able to return. It was not home-sickness after four years' absence at the war; it was the pull of the land from which he had been uprooted. He put the meaning of the change himself in saying that the people who walk on pavements have lost the sense of heaven and earth. Of earth *and* heaven.

The economy of his father's farm had depended like the self-renewal of the animal organism upon its own powers and processes of self-maintenance; now he found himself buying wool from farmers in Devon and Cornwall, seeds from London, from Timbuctoo, from anywhere. And selling them again, trafficking in them. The buying and selling in Cornwall had been incidental to the farm, but now it was the farm that had become incidental to the exchange from without of farm-products. So with wool. How little, he said, does the wearer of wool realise how much the weather, the soil and the nutrition of the animal affects the quality of what he is wearing! Seed, as he said himself, now represented so many lbs. at such and such a price; he was no longer seeing it from the cradle, watching its potentialities and assessing its quality. It was in his blood to note what the seed could make of itself and what he could do to induce it to make the best of itself; it had become his profession to make what he could out of it. The sense of what seeds were and could be in themselves is stronger in him than in any man I have known, and the puzzled way he spoke of having looked at them from a totally different point of view was even more revealing than his tale.

Then there was the mill. This was a steel roller-mill, not the stone-grinding one his uncle had been forced to let go. The difference here was as great as that between growing seeds and only profiting by them. The stone-miller of course made his profit, but his primary purpose was to grind grain into flour. The primary purpose of the roller-miller is reversed; his rollers extract the wheat-germ because it is profitable to do so. Hosking was in no doubt at all about this. Long before the days of the

breakfast-food firms buying the wheat-germ, he took it home with him for his porridge and his biscuits. To-day on his table he has the best whole-grain bread I have ever tasted, baked by his wife. The good miller, he said, milled the whole grain palatably, hygienically and digestibly from fresh wheat locally grown. But it would not keep (good things to eat seldom do). The modernised millers imported the dry Canadian wheats which will store and travel, standardised the moisture content and extracted the offals with the germ to be resold. Big business sprang out of lifeless bread. Because of their high moisture content, our home-grown wheats, superior in quality to any wheat in the world, cannot be stored for a prolonged period.

Both uncle and nephew were perfectly well aware that the whole-grain flour of the home-wheat had a dietetic value to which the imported wheats could not be compared. But by the irony of progress they found themselves buying wheats from all over the world at the expense not only of the old family business of watermilling, selling the flour locally and grinding it whole but of that very self-sufficiency of which the parental farm in Cornwall had been a shining example. At the expense too of nutrition. How important is this? We do not yet know. But we do know that when unpolished rice was stripped of its skin, beri-beri swept not only many a native population but our troops at Gallipoli. As soon as the whole rice-grain was issued to the troops, they recovered. The germ of the wheat lies close to the skin of the berry: both rice and wheat are cereals and the process of removing the life-force is much the same in both. The life-cell of any cereal is as the hearth to the house.

The pair bought Manitoba wheat for the good reason that it is a strong wheat with a high percentage of gluten, and gluten swells up the grain to make bigger loaves. And there were the "improvers" which made the grains blow up the more and like the soft wheats gave more loaves to the sack. They could bleach them to give that whiteness which had become the hallmark of suburban gentility. The germ, the real nutrient, went into the middlings or sharps for the cattle—that part of it that did not go into Hosking's porridge. Later, it was to make milling yet more profitable by being sold for proprietary breakfast foods and the like. An advertisement for one of these foods in an American magazine runs as follows: "Wheat germ is the golden heart of

wheat that's added in extra amounts to natural whole wheat . . . 2½ times richer than the whole wheat in wheat germ." A few pages away is another advertisement, this time for the bereaved bread, which says: "It is enriched with thiamin, niacin, riboflavin and iron." In such ways commercialism replaces nature. As Hosking put it succinctly, he and his uncle had to make a profit for services not rendered but surrendered.

My friend beside me on that windy height, surrounded by evidences of the work of man guided by nature not markets, had in fact discovered what England did in the nineteenth century and our own. It was much easier and much more profitable to breed money than grow crops, to be a prosperous dealer than a good farmer. He was making a kind of confession. It was made possible by his emergence into a plenitude of his powers won by a dual experience, the second phase of his life violating the first. In removing the life principle from "the staff of life," he was wounding his own instincts and conscience, nourished year by year on his father's farm; by trafficking in seeds he was treating as inert and transferable matter what was alive and capable of endless potentialities. By coming into contact with the sterile world of finance, he was denying his father's house.

I was hearing a modern version of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Hosking's trial and error were even harder than his prototype's, for he became a successful man. Drawing near to the City of London was the only means of gaining the means to buy an estate, and so he set himself to cultivate the business sense. That meant putting aside those intangible things which really governed all the operations of his father's farm. These he was constantly expounding to me in his comments on what he saw during our daily expeditions. It was no doubt the conflict within him that drove him with a kind of ardour to mastering the lawless laws of finance. By the very ease with which the dealer defeated the farmer, Hosking was speeding his journey away from the values of his youth. Thus, he who had received a deeply organic education equipped himself as an expert mechanic. For five years he was the captain of a motor cycle club and won two local trials in a speeding and timing competition from Dartmoor to Land's End. The people who knew him at that time, he said, would not believe that he could ride a horse.

The internal struggle was further illuminated by his studentship at an agricultural college. He went there partly as the follow-on from a good agricultural school. But his main reason was his realisation that there was no longer scope for him on his father's farm and the college might lead to him specialising as a veterinary surgeon. But when he joined his uncle as a miller, woolman and seeds merchant, he felt that the scientific training would be useful to him—as a business man. He appreciated the value of a diploma or degree for his work at the mill. He was also, as he put it, hungry for answers to unresolved problems and perhaps the college would put his hand on the key to them.

That it did not and could not was, though the recognition was of slow growth, the turning-point of his life. He must have had some faith in the educational possibilities of the college; I gathered that he had had few illusions about his business career, even from the beginning. What he discovered was that the college did help him with his business but not at all with that from which it declared its purpose and took its origins, the quest for truth. It was the antinomy between orthodox science and truth which revolutionised his whole outlook and placed his foot upon the first furlong of the road along which he has progressed ever since, the road back. Back to his father's farm, not in the literal sense but in the sense of the parable. The college helped him with his business but it also helped him out of it.

I cannot communicate the electrical meaning of this transformation because to do so one must know the man. He is a man of cautious decisions, not in the least romantic or impulsive in disposition, patient, circumspect and even circuitous in his methods of achieving what he has in mind. He is above all a strategist who studies ways and means, prudent and conciliatory in his diplomacy, slow-moving but tenacious, a man who never thinks on wings nor acts on a spontaneous inspiration. He gives an impression of measure and solidity, and it is easy to see why he has prospered as a director of many businesses. He is a man of sagacity and great discretion, statesmanlike but not, you would bank upon it, in the least given to poetry nor indulgent to the

imagination. His, you would say, is the wisdom of the serpent rather than the flight of the dove.

Yet it is a fact that this man has been moved by an interior vision which he has pursued uninterruptedly if deviously for more than twenty years. When he took the measure of the agricultural college, he took it of modern scientific orthodoxy in general. This he linked with the world of affairs in which he has been and is so much engaged. Thence he surveyed the whole mentality of our times induced by industrialism, and the dissolution both of fixed principles and every rhythm of life. Though he has often been in doubt as to the means of finding "the road back," he has never, once he had made up his mind, been in any as to the way back being the right way. For this man of substance has been guided by his perception that where modern science has failed has been in its refusal to recognise the intangibles. Hence it cannot know the truth. The good husbandman can only be one by recognising them. But science or, as he calls it, pseudo-science, thinks to have replaced them. His mother once said to him, "I don't know but I have complete trust." Hosking's later life might be epitomised as a series of demonstrations to prove the validity of his mother's words. The unknown to-day, he said, is more than ever unknown or, as W. H. Hudson put it, the clearer the perception we bring to the mysteries of life, the more mysterious it is. But the influence of these impalpable factors, which the modern world has left out, govern all the activities of life, and especially so the primary one of husbandry.

His case against modern-agricultural education was that it is a technological pseudo-science that has misled us, not the formulation of and instruction in certain truths for guidance. His own education in the practical round of his father's farm had expected that the new learning would be based on the results of long-term experience. He was surprised to find that it was not related to real farming at all. The chemist was good at chemistry but nothing more; he never professed to be a farmer. The study of plant-life was separated from the place where the plant was grown and so from the conditions of its growth. To Hosking a horse meant hay and oats as well as its anatomy. Holdfast wheat needs a soil that does not suit Little Joss. He vividly remembered writing a paper on cabbages in the pleasure of a long familiarity with them and being disconcerted by the low marks he got for it. He took

it to a man who was an expert in the properties of cabbages from having grown them and he could find nothing wrong with the paper. This "ecological" integration was lacking from the college curriculum but had been implicit in the interlocked economy of his father's farm.

What he was taught was an abstraction from life that fragmented knowledge; it was like learning a language from a gramophone record. Nobody bothered about the results and his concrete mind, rooted to the earth, was repelled by the detachment from real things. The germ of life had been extracted just as it was from the flour in his uncle's mill. Botany was a better thing than the phenomena of plant structure because it was based on the behaviour and characteristics of plants growing in their native element. He was feeling his way to the conclusion that plant chemistry was largely hypothetical and so dogmatic and so dangerous. It was what was not shown by analysis in the laboratory that caught his attention, and that was the intangible. Unless we put on the arithmetical measure it has no value in our eyes. But to measure light in no way discloses what it is and how it acts. What was so interesting in all this was that it was the concrete mind, brought up on material actualities, which in its college education felt the need and the lack of the intangible.

Hosking gave me several instances of the prime importance of that incalculable element which is ruled out but is derived from the mystery of the living cell. The sperm of the best bull looks under the microscope the same as the worst. Six ewes and one ram make seven sheep. But six good ewes and one good ram make more than seven. What is "the good"? It is a quality of things that cannot be expressed arithmetically, and what is true of the animal is equally so of the seed and the soil it lives in. The test of it is the farmer's judgment, not the analyst's microscope. Professor Scott Watson, one of the principal advisors of the Ministry of Agriculture, condemns roots as 85 per cent water. But he fails to take into consideration the relevant fact that animals thrive on roots. It is the hundredth part of a mangel which is the nutrient.

I would go further. Men and beasts draw their energies, either directly in the herbivorous and frugivorous animals or indirectly in the carnivorous, from the vegetable kingdom. Since (leaving out lichens and mosses) there can be no vegetation without soil,

so there can be no life without vegetation. It therefore produces the essentials of foodstuffs. The dietician, Dr. Bircher-Benner, contends that food is organised solar energy, vegetation being the only living substance that can utilise and transform the solar rays. He might have extended his brilliant researches to the soil, whose humus or nutritive energy is decayed vegetation and organic residues, themselves derived from the vegetable kingdom. Thus to condemn roots as valueless is equivalent to excluding sun and soil from the power-stations of living energy.

Again (Hosking went on), a man needs 20 lbs. a day of starch and sugar. But they are useless unless a touch of saliva acts as the catalyst which, without itself changing, converts the starch into sugar. Hall and Voelcker's Tables of Analysis are still the basis of all rationing, though in starch equivalent the bran which every farmer now clamours for is placed low down on the list. Chaff counts for little or nothing by such reckonings and so is burned. The experience of the wiser farmer in these comparative values is, continued Hosking, now regarded as an obstacle to progress. Thus all farm products are compared on a unit basis with outside imported ones, bought per unit on a system of cheapness and cost accountancy. Flavour to science is a combination of lesser and greater elements with certain gases, dispersed after a period of time. But flavour to the consumer is the reason why he consumes.

Fertility to-day, said Hosking, is calculated in terms of NPK. But quite apart from the trace elements, there is no way of assessing either fertility or the potentialities of seeds. Modern science, while accepting the living cell in theory, ignores it in practice as "whimsy stuff." Therefore, its balance sheet is false. Even the city man would not accept a false balance sheet. He does not know how inaccurate it must be, while the *hubris* of science fosters the same illusion. Hosking spoke often of the overweening pride of the expert and specialist who have lost all contact with the land. Consider the magnitude of power in a wheat-field. Man only directs that power from the field to his own body whence, translated, it is returned to the earth. Or, as he put it on another occasion: the seed and the plant have an incomparably greater "power take-off" (in our mechanised world this means the connecting power-shaft between tractor and cultivator) than any engineer could produce. To appreciate this is the humbling of arrogance, and by lacking reverence the man of

science misses truth. Thus Hosking was pleading for culture and its values, not technocracy, as the means to apprehending truth.

We shall not in our turn appreciate these critical perceptions at their true value without considering the age of the critic and the time such judgments were forming in his mind. To-day, the tyranny of technocracy is far more apparent than when Hosking was slowly disengaging his mind from it. The aeroplane, which has so far done little but harm to mankind, was then an exciting new invention. The alliance of this seemingly omnipotent force, modern orthodox science, not only with destruction but with business monopoly and the combines, had still to reveal itself.

Hosking went on to say that the assessment of output per man in agriculture was nothing but a scientific euphemism for the depopulation of the land. But that of output per acre per annum is, he added, almost as fallacious. A farm-year of 12 calendar months is not a real measurement; the all-round performance of a farm over a period of ten years is nearer. But even then the true test is the judgment of the farmer. The judgment of his eye is the authentic one, and the more the farmer relies upon urban measurements of weights and the footrule; the less true is his judgment. Because we measure falsely, our standards have become so low that we fail to understand how badly we farm.

The scientific training had, Hosking had said, helped him in his business. In milling, prices came first and quality meant (and means) that which gives the baker most loaves. He gave instances of what this interplay between science and money had actually effected, namely the conversion of real into paper values. Examples are countless. I pick out one which Hosking sent me. It advertises a trade food called "calfmilk" on the ground that, if babies are fed on artificial food, depending upon "the scientific control of manufacture," why not calves?

This pseudo-science, continued Hosking, had created the dealer-farmer who relied on machinery merely to cheapen his costs and capture quick profits. The dealer-farmer made up in dealing what he lost in farm-economy. He appeared to be successful for a time but was progressively mortgaging and destroying the productivity of his farm. He had progressed from the all-rounder to the specialist; if he was good with his arable, he was poor with stock or *vice versa*. This had meant the suppression of

the mixed farm, the key to fertility. He was making money (more than half of which went to the Inland Revenue as a tax on fertility) and forfeiting wealth, the welfare of the land on which he and all mankind depended. Science had taught him its own fragmentation and from it he had caught such superficial judgments as "nature red in tooth and claw" and the natural world come to its present harmony of organism with environment by millions of accidental happenings. It did not, I may add, take this view from Darwin himself. He wrote: "This grand sequence of events (evolution) the mind refuses to accept as the result of blind chance. The understanding revolts from such a conclusion."

Orthodox science, Hosking went on, had taught the farmer its short-term calculations which put him first in three years and nowhere in ten. In accepting the chemical bag as a substitute for organics, he was crumbling away his farm. Cheapness had been idolised at the expense of everything worth living, and the attachment of science to commercialism had resulted in the paradox that what is not real science is so accounted and what is called science is not. Lastly, both science and big business farming were obsessed with the disease that their own estrangement from reality had helped to bring about. It would never be controlled until the attention of the world was switched back to health, which is wholeness.

The same decline, he added, had infected the labourer, pre-occupied now with his wage only. But the worst symptom of all was the helpless dependence of the farmer upon the dealer in world-markets. The pure dealer could always beat the farmer. Observing that hay was short, he could buy Canadian hay at nearly half the price the farmer needed to cover his cost. Our economic system which made money most difficult to get when it was most needed was a further contribution to the disintegration of the farm-economy of self-help and organic self-support.

III

In all these stray observations which I have strung together, Hosking was always referring back in his mind to his father's farm. His had been a negative conversion; the successful missionary had been the dark angel. There followed the positive steps to

honour and put it into action. Hosking is not the man ever to act precipitately, spectacularly and defiantly. He bided his time and hastened slowly. The thing to do was to manœuvre his way from trafficking and processing to growing and to combine the two with the last as the first. In his teens he had gone about quietly looking for different plants, especially the grasses. It was largely through his unique knowledge of the clovers and the endless types of grasses that he became a Fellow of the Linnæan Society and finally Chairman of the National Institute of Agricultural Botany. He and his brother-in-law began to go about the county shows in the West, displaying the variety of strains they had collected.

When the milling combine bought up the good will of the Devonshire Mill (in other words, the monopoly), Hosking devoted himself with his brother-in-law to building up world-wide connections with the Ashford seeds firm he had joined. He became the president of a large seeds trade organisation and a delegate at the International Seeds Trade Congress, representing many countries and occupied with testing as well as growing seeds. In all these activities, he busied himself more and more with the technical possibilities of growing seeds not as opposed to but in conjunction with the market. In all of them he was driven by a single urge—how to find his way back to the land and overcome the supreme obstacle of its lack of scope in a wholly urbanised society. If he could not climb over it, he would go round it, and he would use seeds as his link.

The congress and the business gave him widespread opportunities of travel and for observations on continental and American agriculture. Danish bacon was not the best in the world; Denmark was merely making the best profits out of it. Her parasitic economy was the reverse of what it ought to be. Dutch agriculture, less celebrated, was far superior. Germany in her agricultural methods was only an imitation of the United States in big business farming, except on the older Austrian estates and in the south where the peasant tradition survived. Hosking lived happily with the French peasants of Normandy and Brittany who wasted nothing, and visited the Swedes before they victimised themselves with mechanisation. On an estate in Hungary he had seen teams both of black oxen and of white moving like sailing ships in a calm across the black soil and 120

horses whose stabling was better than the housing of their grooms. But feudalism has its pros as well as its cons, and its serfdom was certainly no worse than the slavery of State Socialism. It was paternalist and patriarchal, not bureaucratic. There was no freedom but no harshness, which is more than can be said for modern totalitarianism. The land-labourers were "treated like dogs," as the saying is, but these human dogs were treated with kindness.

His verdict on the United States,¹ whither he went to see his successful Kentish clover, was the reverse of that of our orthodox agricultural professors. He saw behind the façade, namely the failure of smash-and-grab farming. A dismayed consciousness of it was expressed in the careful adoption of our own "old-fashioned" husbandry—proper rotations, crops ploughed in instead of cashed, contour-ploughing, terracing (practised by nearly all primitive cultivators in hilly regions), strip cropping (the reverse of monoculture), planting instead of felling windbreaks, fewer machines and fertilizers. Our professors are shown Wall Street farming, the reverse of real farming, while our expediency farming now imitates the United States just where they went wrong. Hosking remembered one thing about Swiss farming, which he regarded as the most thrifty and in animal and herbage husbandry the best in the world. A farm-girl had said to him, "we could make our living entirely on your hedgerows." It was the kind of thing I should have expected him to have remembered.

A good example of Hosking's shrewd and far-seeing methods of attaining his ends occurred in his description of how his firm at Ashford produced the best swede seeds on the market—first grown by his firm on Romney Marsh. The swedes were cut by hand and laid in bundles, dead ripe, upon the soil. They were carefully loaded in special sledges pulled by skids and drawn by horses to that corner of the field where the wind could be properly utilised. They were emptied on a ground-sheet, spread and rolled out with a horse on padded feet to open out the pods. The stalks were then gently shaken with pitchforks to allow the seed to fall. Pods and seeds together were thrown by a shovel against the wind to clean the seed which was further winnowed through a sieve slid to and fro by the human hand. It was then sacked and warehoused for a final cleaning with a machine.

¹ Long, of course, before the appalling revelations of the business farming in *Ill Fares the Land* (Faber, 1945).

This is a perfect illustration of a primitive husbandry adopted to secure the finest possible results, with automatic machinery subordinate and beautifully adjusted to it. Probably Cobbett witnessed much the same process when he went to stay with his Herefordshire friend, Mr. Palmer. Mr. Palmer grew fine swedes which he sowed after vetches, cutting their tap-roots with two oxen. "Radical swedes" or "Swedish turnips" were one of Cobbett's pioneer crops, and he made a point of visiting them, wherever grown, on his Rides. A further link between Hosking, Cobbett and traditional England appears in the fact that swedes were grown in 1804 on the common fields of Bredon.

Hosking has also used machinery as secondary to hand-skills in his three flax-mills, most notably in the one at Devizes. Because his processed flax is of a superior quality to any other in England without diminishing the quantity, he has had his way against bureaucratic control. While I was with him in 1944, he showed me above the door of the baling-room a framed tablet quoting a sentence of mine in an address I had given to the staff and mill-girls the year before. "Take care of the quality and the quantity will take care of itself." This was a proud moment for me. I felt richly associated with a great movement of constructive action on whose general adoption depends the salvation of our country. But if I said it, Hosking lives it. He even makes it pay in the teeth of a chaotic and unanchored financial system. Quality always so paid before modern civilisation went money-mad.

The right way to understand Hosking is, I think, to regard this plotted purpose of his to feel and edge his way back to the land as an ambition. We associate the word with making a career or making money and so it has become almost synonymous with self-interest. But Hosking was—and is—ambitious to become the good husbandman of a farm where he can put into practice the ideas and principles he has matured over long years. But it is a practical ambition, not an idealism. It is far removed from the back-to-the-landers who talk in the air about "the community life," issue badly typed manifestos with strings of polysyllabic abstractions about "service" and are the lineal descendants of Coleridge's Pantisocrats. Beards are usually their badge and country life is to them something between a pastoral, a lecture hall and a fret-work bench.

Hosking's tactical manoeuvres to secure his darling end are

very different from these. His way of getting a firmer grip on the land than by seeds-growing was to go into partnership with a relation. They took a derelict farm of 800 acres (later increased to 1400) with a downland sheepwalk of another 1000 in Sussex. Here he grew corn, folded sheep, milked 160 cows and kept 2000 pigs. He worked nine tractors but made them subordinate to horses. He has a wonderful flair for picking his men, as I can testify from having met a number of the staff, fieldsmen and workers in the Devizes Flax Mill. He chose for his farm-bailiff a wiry, long-faced, hard-headed Scotsman, now one of his fieldsmen at the mill, the last man to be seduced from his allegiance to organic husbandry by the makeshift methods of chemical nostrums, a slick mechanism and the balance sheet. It was this man who remarked to me that, if Robert Burns had driven a tractor, he would never have written "Wee sleekit cowerin' timorous beastie . . ." because only a ploughman would have seen the mouse.

This was in 1928, but ten years later the parting came. Hosking returned to Kent intending, the moment the occasion offered, to found an "island of example" all his own. The War came a year later; Government changed its face from frowning to beaming on the growing and processing of flax and this perforce became his paramount interest.

Hosking was very nearly the first flax-miller in England before the war. He was one of the earliest men to have rescued the continuity of a crop that with barley was the first to be grown in our island. The ancient mariners who built the Temple of Avebury and observed the heavens from Silbury Pyramid knew what they were about. The Avebury plateau is still some of the best land in the south for growing flax, and Hosking was the means by which the traveller to-day can see as in 1800 B.C. fields of flax growing near the great circle.

He had become interested in Irish and Belgian flax as early as 1930. But a crop so aristocratic requires hand-skills, and such labour was deserting the countryside in tens of thousands. Then he met a Belgian flaxman at Canterbury who told him of a mechanical flax-puller; he saw his chance, went to Belgium to see it and he and his brother-in-law and another farmer-seedsman became partners to grow it in England. The Belgian became the technical director of the plant which was set up in the barn at

Pluckley in Kent, Hosking's present home. The flax was grown in Essex and Kent and scutched at Pluckley. In spite of the importation of cheap flax from Europe, he made it pay the first year.

From these beginnings he built up a staff and workers who themselves learned by experience of this delicate crop to discard automatic processing in favour of the hand-skills. The less mass-produced the finer the fibre and, as their interest was caught, so the work became more manual and qualitative. How he is using the machine as a method of graduating the workers to recovering the traditional craftsmanship of the workshop I have described in *This Plot of Earth*. I saw a further example of it the following year. At a shed in the grounds of the mill, he showed me what looked like a small motor mower with a very simple engine, two handles and a pair of small rubber wheels. This is the Bantam Puller which pulls the flax without binding it and so enables the girls to "cone" it into "beats" or sheaves. Thus this machine enabled the fields to come to the mill and the mill to go down to the fields to the incalculable advantage of both and of the quality of the flax-fibre. It also enables Hosking to go to the small farmers who by the aid of the Bantam can grow two or three acres of flax. Since it is the small farmer who almost invariably grows the best quality of flax, this machine is directly contributing to it, to maintaining the small farm and to encouraging craftsmanship in agriculture, three services in one.

Contrast the subtlety and at the same time the solidity of this form of education with the unhappy fate of the ex-Service men after the last war. Their desire for the good life was gratified by a poultry run or a few cows pumped with concentrates and their consequent fluid exported to a milk-factory. Hosking told me that, if the imports of flax had been controlled and the home-industry been given a fair price, he would have achieved his aim of transforming a factory into a workshop in half the time.

When the war did establish a fair price, Government control was riveted on the Flax Mill. I asked Hosking what its qualifications were. He answered, nil. It gives some measure of what the countryman has to endure at the hands of an urbanised England that this noble project, painfully born and arduously nursed into manhood, can be confounded at a stroke by the money-market in the post-war importation of cheap flax from the Baltic.

Flax had recovered one rural industry. Hosking took advant-

age of the dispersal of industries in war to lay the foundation of yet another at Langport on the Somerset Parrett between Ilchester and Bridgwater. He took over a seeds-seller's business there and with the same object of converting it into a workshop by harnessing the storing and marketing to producing, testing, roguing¹ and riddling seeds of the best quality. One of his ambitions is to revive the basketry of Sedgmoor whose marshes spread below the tilted little town. He must discover the best basketers and set them up primarily to make baskets but also to train apprentices. He must improve the designs of the best types of basket and link them to the seeds business. The blind are good basketers; a few might find a home at Langport. The firm must renovate and enlarge the withy-beds of the Moor so that the indoor workers may keep in touch with nature just as the mill-girls at Devizes go out into the fields to "cone" the "beats" of flax. For Hosking's grand purpose is the restoration of the severed intercourse between the workshop and the fields, the basis of traditional England. Is there any man in England who has done as much practical work for so great an end *ad majorem Dei gloriam*.

As Chairman of the National Institute of Agricultural Botany Hosking with his fellows, notably Dr. Hunter of Cambridge, is engaged in improving the quality of English wheats. The mother stocks (mostly cereals) for this regenerative work are drawn from Langport. Seeds housed and processed there are many of them drawn from the Kentish indigenous strains he had formerly experimented with and put on the market. Thus he links one of his multifarious activities with another in that aspiration for wholeness which governs the toils of his life. At the same time, when I was with him in our travels over the West Country, he was negotiating with the Ministry of Agriculture for the Institute to have a farm of its own by which seeds could be tested through the animal. He has already waited a year for an answer. So his mind is always hovering like a kestrel over his father's farm, the source whence cometh his strength.

IV

Langport and the country of West Somerset its influence is permeating was the destination of one of our journeys. In all of

¹ Roguing is ridding seeds of its "rogue" or inferior specimens and of the weeds.

them I found myself living on two planes constantly intersecting. The scenes and incidents of our travels reflected in my own mind were interacting with the stages of Hosking's life and his conclusions upon them. This dual sense was itself impinged upon by the confluence of past and present which not even a modern can fail to find stealing over him in Somerset. Not in a dream but in reality it is still the Holy Land of England—the soaring fifteenth century towers are not to be pushed out of the consciousness, not to be seen merely as picturesque additions to the landscape. They mould it, they hold it, they reign over it. And because of what Hosking told me and the contrasts I kept on seeing between the true and the false, I perceived that they were *the* reality.

It is only through "the road back" that the individual can be rescued as a soul, not the puppet of a totalitarian State. It is only through husbandry in all its implications that the individual can become himself again, not by individualism but by projecting himself into his work. Only so can he once more control his own destiny and break the hideous fatalism that accepts a garage to hide Glastonbury Abbey and hands over the fields of England to the money-power. These towers are the gesture of man's free will, lost to him as the "mobile male" of the industrial State. But the towers are fixed in the land; they bind man to his place, giving him freedom but demanding service in return, giving him the joy of his work in his local communities but also labour for necessities in the sweat of his brow.

As we passed through Wells, the great jewel on the primitive breast of Mendip, and Glastonbury—now the crowning shame of the nation—Hosking said to me that his work at Langport was a missionary one. It is as such that I shall always see it. The work he is doing is the only way to recover the soul of England. There is no other means of regenerating the dignity of man.

We left the Mendips and passed over the Poldens to Somerton. This stone village looks like a little town by a pride in its layout that acknowledges the rise and dip of the wooded hills. It comes *from* the Poldens because its stone, built into the houses like large bricks, is Polden limestone. There is a hill on this range which *exposes the strata in triple stripes, limestone overlying red sandstone*. Somerton's frontispiece. Yet this country now is nothing but an exporting milk-factory; its device is the milk-stand on

the road. It has no longer any identity or reality of its own, which are only in the landscape. It is literally giving itself away, and what that means became yet more apparent further on.

At Langport, like an Italian hill-town spilling over into the marshes and crowned at its crown by the great Towers of Langport and Huish Episcopi, we picked up the local manager. He is another of Hosking's finds, a young man brimming over with his apostolate. It is all pedigree seeds-stock at Langport, the least impurity incubating a forest of charlock. The seeds are recorded like a pedigree herd, grown by good farmers in the neighbourhood and supervised throughout. Herein Hosking's firm differs from that of the average seeds-dealer, indifferent to where and how the seed is grown and what becomes of it so long as he buys it cheap and sells it dearer. He often buys it, in fact, whether immature or not and, if the former, it will germinate but is less resistant to disease. Consequently, Hosking, whose object is to induce the right kind of farmer to grow pure strains in the right soil and conditions for growth and maturity, is not loved by the seeds-dealer. His only profits are remuneration for work done. I was struck by the manager telling me that this right kind of farmer is the small one for the pride he takes in his crops and so his craftsmanly cultivation of them. Here again, Hosking's example was nursing the family farmer in contradistinction from the dealer who battens on him by the small man's need for ready money.

On the way to Bridgwater, we crossed a corner of the marshes by Aller (to the native Oller) and King's Sedgmoor with the knobs of the Ham Hills on our right and on our left the green coverlet of the Moor, patterned by rhines and tasselled by trees. The heavenward Tower of Weston Zoyland, parapeted in the Somerset tradition and as rich in decoration as the alluvial soil in fertility, graced the miles of flats. What you noticed was that there were many farms but no homesteads; it was absentee farming, as bad a thing as absentee landlordism. For that very reason, it was cow farming or "teat-pulling," which is unbalanced and in the end suicidal farming. From here north to Chedzoy, Middlezoy and the estuary of the Parrett and west to the Devonian Pethertons as far as the eastern cliff-line of the Quantocks, is some of the princeliest land for crops and fattening beasts in England. Instead of being rotated on mixed livestock it was being cashed in on

milk and nothing but milk. Hosking sighed for Romney Marsh sheep on it, unconsciously echoing Cobbett who praised the immense flocks and herds he had seen on Romney Marsh.

Specialised dairying is, as he put it, "exporting the farm." Every day the calcium and phosphates leave the farm and ultimately find their way *via* the water-closet to the sea. Nothing is put back on the land. Or, as I put it, the farm is bled daily, not now and again as the old leeches used to bleed their patients, and of this unstaunched wound the victim ultimately dies. I have never seen Hosking wrathful but once, and that was when he set his eye on the farms, corrupted by absenteeism and the milk-churn, on either side of the road through the Moor. They were already only half alive and he remembered when they had been robust in sheep and bullocks. The cattle suffer as much as the land, being pumped up on foreign concentrates in peace, malnourished on made-up commercial rations or cowsick pastures and poor hay in war, an invitation to disease; the farmers suffer as much as their cattle, for cow-farming is lazy, feckless and pettifogging farming. I remembered seeing a farm on one of our earlier journeys near Savernake that now lives on the milk-churn. The fieldsman with us told me that it once grew good wheat, oats and barley and had a flock of hurdled sheep.

I dwell on these invalid farms, a parallel in sickness with the mechanised *latifundia* of Wiltshire, for a good reason. They are both a denial of the self-supporting mixed farm. This, as Hosking said, is like a snake with life in every section of it, while the dairy farm has only one vital organ, concentrates. If they stop, it is the end of it. Soil-erosion and the creep of the desert over four continents are the direct result of the farms of the world exporting themselves into the industrial cities.

Another thing we noticed on Sedgemoor was the official drainage of the rhines. Here precisely the same phenomenon had taken place as at Itchington in the Severn Vale. The withies that hold the banks were over-felled; the weed-seeds were deposited on the banks beyond and the water-table was being lowered. To the modern "agriculturalist" (whose very name reveals his remoteness from practical farming), the husbandry of the Cistercian monks would be like a child's fairy story, unworthy his adult attention. Yet the Cistercians of Buildwas Abbey in Shropshire had a drainage system of carrying off excess water in

combination with sluicing irrigation channels incomparably more advanced than the methods of the modern Catchment Board.

The occasion was marked as we travelled on towards Bridgwater by Hosking's observations on drought. Drought is not weather, he said, but infertility. A fertile soil is one in which moisture is distributed and accessible to the plant, and he had seen drought in areas of high rainfall and luxuriance in others of low. The true scientist is he who conserves the rainfall by good husbandry. His skill and management do so by building the organic matter into his fields. But our over-emphasis on the artificial in modern farming has meant the suffocation of the good husbandman by the chemist, the engineer, the accountant, the statistician, the profiteer and others, all crowding in to upset the equilibrium of his husbandry. The use of fertilizers as a plant food instead of as a stimulant to the food already present breaks down the organic matter and increases the evaporation. Drought and drainage should be considered in relation to one another. Our psuedo-science now separates them, excavating dykes and ditches without discretion and speeding our rainfall to the sea. Continuous corn-cropping accelerates loss of moisture which herbage, fodder plants and even annual weeds help to conserve. It was the knowledge of our forefathers that soils well dunged or otherwise rich in organic matter and well cultivated suffer little from drought. A drought in the knowledge and understanding of good husbandry was a far more dangerous symptom of our times than a low rainfall because it magnified the effects of it. There was an art in farming water to which modern science is oblivious.

It seemed to me that Bridgwater, which surely has the tallest steeple, surmounted by a golden cock, on the squattest tower in England, was a dividing line between modern and more or less traditional agriculture, between cash-farming for profit and subsistence husbandry. At any rate, the deeper we went into the heart of the West, the more homely were the fields, the more frequent their human occupants and the more organic their methods of cultivation. It is in western Somerset that the Langport firm has some of its best seeds-growing customers. I saw various evidences of this intercourse between a traditional farming county and that new as distinguished from orthodox science of which Langport is an ambassador.

A flash of conversation lit up the meaning of this while we were inspecting a field of cocksfoot and broad red clover—Langport always recommends a hive of bees per acre of clover. The cocksfoot seed had been drilled and the clover broadcasted, so that the grass appeared in long leafy rows whose spaces between would be filled up later by the clover. The field had in three years already produced a hay crop, a grazing season, a seed-crop of clover and another of cocksfoot and all the seeds had come from Langport. It looked almost forbiddingly like a demonstration plot, as though it should have been roped in and labelled. Cocksfoot needs nitrogen and the farmer had dosed it with sulphate of ammonia. The link with tradition appeared tenuous here.

Hosking approved because the field was already very rich in humus, while the stimulant by quickening the crop would by grazing supply still more. But, he said, pensively, he would have preferred liquid manure between the rows. Meanwhile the young manager, exhilarated by the field, was saying how much more "technical" and advanced the son who farmed it was than his father. Yes, said Hosking this time dryly, he has gone back to his grandfather by rotating and sheeping his leys. The trouble with the father was that he was not old-fashioned enough. The remark was like a sudden beam of light. So many fathers of sons now farming lost heart in the great depression that their land lost it too. After them comes the new science to give conscious expression to the intuitive husbandry of the grandfathers. But too many of the young farmers of to-day, unlike this one, cultivate by the test-tube, the gadget, the bottle of elixir and the catechism of technocracy.

Our journey ended at the broad-acred farm of Mr. Chapman of North Petherton on that same old red sandstone that bore the kindly fruits of Pomona Farm in Herefordshire. It ended there too in other ways: we had come first through monoculture in corn and then through monoculture in cows to reach a haven of mixed husbandry. And this farm was near enough to Hosking's father's farm as he has described it to me to symbolise the end of his own long journey through so many years of trial and error and discovery, the end of his enormous labours in the achievement

of an "island of example." The connection was even closer. Mr. Chapman sows his fields with pedigree seeds from Langport. Now Hosking was visiting him to advise him among other things in the growing of flax.

The owner of the 400 acres we tramped over has had a curious history. A tall, robust, grey-haired man with a presence as decided as his opinions and a jaw as firm and strong as his voice, he was once well known on the turf. Now the racing man with his adventurous turn of mind is not one to pick out as a shining example of thrift and economy. How compelling, then, the pull of the land that this very man should now be the master of a farm as perfect in the balance of its economy, as near a unity in self-subsistence as these days of long-distance squander-farming will allow! It is a farm based in intention and not far behind it in performance upon the export of surpluses, and a farm of that calibre can only be managed by a master-husbandman. His foot it was that fattened the land and his staff of office was a spud. A farm more weedless I have yet to see. There was a further kinship between him and his land. His acres stood on a wide and open plateau, surrounded by the uplands of the red marls to the south and east and the Quantocks to the west. The effect of space walled in by height was reflected in the strength and candour, the large simplicity and the forthrightness of his character. That strength had enabled him to give up his racing. He had received in turn something of the serenity of the free expanses and the distant hills.

Perhaps the most refreshing of all the goodly sights on his farm was a flock of 160-200 breeding ewes, Dorset Horns, the lambs of which he kept up to the spring until they were almost mutton. The first lambs were already born in the late September of our visit. And a farmer who keeps a sizeable flock of hurdled sheep to-day is one not afraid to breast the roaring tide of the times in the solitude of his convictions. These sheep were in clover both literally and figuratively. There were spacious fields of roots to feed them and for them to feed the land, mangolds, turnips, swedes. They looked like an advertisement in a catalogue, and their lustrous free-growing leaves shone in the sun. It was an entertainment to see him and Hosking with their heads together in a field of them whose high-banked hedge had baffled me. They looked like a pair of Chinese sages pondering the riddles of the universe. So in a sense they were in contemplating

the mysteries of growth, a meditation on mangolds. There was too a fine umbrageous crop of thousand-headed kale, fed off by folded sheep and not cut for the cows as the dairyman cuts, to be converted into milk and exported off the farm. On the family farm in Cornwall, Hosking's father had preferred thousand-headed kale to rape and sheep and pigs were folded on it, while a quantity was also cut and carted to the pigs and the cattle indoors.

A vigorous herd I saw too of North Devon bullocks and heifers, hard-grazing a three-years ley. When cattle are enjoying themselves, they usually graze up a field in an informal line. The field looked like a lawn—cattle in long grass, as Hosking was careful to say, is more often than not a sign of bad farming. The seed of this sward had been broadcasted and it had timothy in it as well as two clovers and rye-grasses. Timothy (S.48) Hosking is planning for the low-lying moors of Sedgmoor. The cattle on the farm are as self-supporting as the sheeped and rotated fields, since half the herd was home-bred and a number of the calves run with their mothers. Mr. Chapman also kept pigs and five horses, together with free-ranging poultry and a few dairy cows.

How he had avoided turning the farm into a milk-factory showed great resolution and independence on his part. But as I listened to his blunt and caustic commentary on this theme, I became less surprised that he had had his own way. The pigs being fed on the separated milk, there was no fertility leakage. He grew wheat, fine barley, dredge corn, trifolium, vetches, mustard, beans and peas (hereabouts is a notable pea-land), besides the leys and roots, and his wise and persistent cultivations had educated his arable into a kindness of tilth that made the farm a garden. He also had an orchard whose crop he had just sold for £200, reserving the Coxes, Bramleys and others for presents and the household. The variety of the crops, their careful rotation and the abounding health of crop and beast were a sight for eyes weary with gazing on scorched earth, tousled and uneven stubbles, untidy threshing floors, manless fields. The families of his men had been on this family land for 200 years. The point about the whole farm was that it lived on itself, perpetually renewing itself. Its trimmed hedgerows, smiling fields and comely animals, its order and seemliness were a testimonial to this *démodé* type of farm more worth than bushels of argument.

But the most comfortable sight were the covered yards, three

of them with 40 cattle in them all the winter. The straw-ricks were as carefully built and thatched as the corn. Fattening steers were wading belly-deep in lakes of straw. Cobbett's joyous record of the yards in the Valley of the Avon—"Cattle and horses are bedded up to their eyes"—leaped to life in the farm at North Petherton. By a hay barn my nostrils were titillated by an aroma I had not smelled for many years. It was the sweet vernal hay which has become almost a lost scent on English farms. But if we inhale with delight this fragrance (better than all the gums of Araby), don't the cattle, said the farmer? And if so, added Hosking, aren't their digestive juices stimulated?

Felicitous touches like this one, overtones, internal rhymes, little superfluities of bounty are what give the measure of a good farm, of all good workmanship. These things are always missed in compiling records, making surveys, filling forms, but they are the key to Hosking's intangibles. I could not tell where this yeoman had been threshing, so swept and garnished was the ground beside his stacks. In other places, litter was the norm. Again, when we were in the ley watching the cattle grazing, our host, having left his spud in another field, took out his pocket-knife and extracted a thistle, the only one I saw. He not only saved his straw but his cavings, the man who had once played with thousands on the racecourse. He cut his corn very short so that there would be more straw for the cattle to stamp. And he declared that "nothing on God's earth" would make him use sulphate of ammonia again.

God's earth : lofty over the wide plateau and all his land springs the noble Tower of North Petherton, one more of the great ones of Somerset. Into the art of its building had gone that same local craftsmanship this farmer so studiously gave to his fields. The tower was a finger blessing the fields. But the inter-communion between them has been so long broken that only by his way and Hosking's way can they be reunited. They must be so: agriculture and religion are the natural forces, however maimed and long parted, to withstand the tidal wave of automatism. Divided, each of these forces, the farm and the Tower of North Petherton, are powerless; through craftsmanship they can become great allies. For the intangible, whether it be beauty or truth or righteousness, is always implicit in craftsmanship.

At tea Mr. Chapman gave his salty opinion of the land-

speculator, now active everywhere. Afterwards, I caught further overtones nobody would have suspected in a man so John Bullish. His house had been built a century before the fifteenth century tower and it had a fine cobbled yard which he took the greatest pride in keeping free of weeds, a tough job. As we left, he pointed out that on the Chard heights along the horizon the light is to be seen under the trees that crowned them.

One of the last things we saw on that journey was Blackmore Farm, not far away. It had been an ecclesiastical building at one time; a chapel attached to it had a canopied niche with groinings like those of Westminster Abbey. The windows of the farmhouse were of two-light pointed arches and the front door was one of the finest I had ever seen, mullioned, studded and of arched black oak with a bolt-hole in the flanking stone wall into which fitted a great beam. There were secret passages in the house to Cannington, the Farm Institute there, and Dodington Hall. A sacred building left derelict and degenerated into a farm-steading would be the guide-book comment. Better in use anyway than a show piece, a picturesque relic. Better heaven should find refuge on earth like this than be banished among the stars or mocked in a factory.

VI

A similar experience occurred on a journey south into Hampshire to advise another farmer on which of his fields to grow flax. On the way and in the open cloud-shaped lonely downland between Shrewton and Stonehenge, we passed the sheep-runs of the farm of a Mr. Alexander. It was an extraordinary spectacle because the Downs really were here a sheep-run and a cattle-run too. The pastures had all been reseeded to the magic improvement of the thin upper chalk and beside them were acres of good roots and kale. They had been sheeped and cropped and undersown and hard-grazed until poor downland had become rich meadow. The cattle were cross-bred Galloways and there must have been a thousand head of them—"a thousand beaves at pasture," thick as a harboured fishing fleet on these green oceanic uplands.

It was not only an extraordinary sight but almost unique. For Salisbury Plain, even with the military and the suburban spread of the larger villages and towns, is far more solitary than

it was in Shakespeare's days and the Middle Ages. "Fifteen hundred shorn, what comes the wool to?" says the Clown in *The Winter's Tale* of the flock on a single yeoman's farm. But the myriad sheep, among them the old Wiltshire breed, have gone like the bustard. By this change, the green vacancy had come to life.

Across Wiltshire and for miles towards Romsey, Hosking was annotating the great conflict between modernism and first principles, pictured in the farming sights of our journey, by a discourse on discing. The disc is the most fashionable modern implement for tilling or harrowing a seed-bed, and I wanted to know what he thought about it. He began with the revolutionary statement that "a fine tilth makes the disc obsolete." So I knew that the journey would be exciting even had we been covering miles of suburbs instead of the Downs and the New Forest.

In the slow unruffled pensive way so characteristic of him, he proceeded to expound his meaning. Modern methods of cultivation are based on bad and unrealist timing for the paradoxical reason that they are geared to the clock and not to the soil. This has been aggravated by other artificial devices, notably by mechanisation as a substitute for skilled labour which was accustomed to choose the right time with the right tool. Again, timing is much more accurate with the small farmer than the large and mechanisation has been mostly applied to the big farms. This disability in securing a good tilth for a seed-bed we have tried to overcome by brute force, namely by chopping up the soil into cubes with the disc as distinct from teasing it into friability with the old-fashioned harrows. These small squares make a soil inferior in texture to one that has been crumbled and powdered. On Hosking's father's farm, the predecessor of the disc (still used in "backward areas") was the tined zigzag harrow, whose diamond tines were each made separately by the village blacksmith. Their action was the same as that of the garden fork which teases out the clod. Another tool which performed the same office as the modern disc-harrow or plough was the "chiseler and shaver," now almost obsolete and its makers probably dead. With this his father brought the roots of couch to the surface, more or less intact. But the disc cuts it up and scatters the roots where they easily sprout again.

Hosking made a striking comparison in the effects of these former tools as compared with the disc. Farmhouse butter of the

best quality is grained and can be broken apart like small shot. But poor quality butter has no grain and so has a thick substance with a greasy surface. So with the soil under the harrow when it can be disintegrated into fine particles and under the disc when it is partitioned into cubes. The structure is totally different as between the one operation and the other. The roots of a plant are happy in the crumbs like butter grains, but unhappy among the squares. In the first, they can travel and form a system much more easily, and are better aerated.

Hosking did not mention one advantage of the disc harrow, according to Edward Faulkner, the American farmer, in *Ploughman's Folly*. It is the implement round which he has built up his argument against the plough. But his brief actually condemns not so much the plough itself as the whole system of cultivation practised by the American farmer to-day and to a less extent by the British farmer as well. "It follows of necessity," Faulkner has written, "that if man duplicates in his farming the soil conditions which in Nature produce such perfect results, he will be able to grow similarly perfect crops on cultivated land." These he can achieve by "incorporating organic matter into the surface soil" with the disc-harrow and without the plough. But he has admitted that a four times ploughing, customary in this country fifty years ago, would prevent the burying of the organic matter below the capacity of the plant to reach it as a single ploughing buries it. Hence, a four times ploughing is in his eyes equivalent to the use of the disc-harrow. The important thing, the book has argued, is to get the organic matter, whether ploughed or disced, into the top-soil.

Further on, we passed what has become an antiquity in Wiltshire, a horse-plough. It was like Hosking not to romanticize this uncommon sight. Being a realist to the bone he went deeper. A horse-plough is often a symptom of what might be called tramp-in-rags farming; the farm-economy has dissolved and has been patched up with bits of string, while the man at the stilts scratches a living in a kind of desperation. The horse-plough may be a relic indeed and to poetize it may well be to damn it to the picturesque. Nothing would serve but the restoration of the whole system of which the horse-plough was an integral part.

We came in sight of Romsey Abbey and both fell silent. That lion of lovely strength on its low mound was a rebuke to dull

despair, and we drew upon its healing power. What man did once he can do again, if only the conditions can be righted. To the farmer, after the field of flax had been chosen, Hosking gave, by example, as is his way, a homily on the rule of return. The roots and shive or skin of the flax-fibre are burned; it is screened and sacked to be restored to the land. One reason why Hosking loves flax is because it takes next to nothing out of the soil. What the seed-bolls do take is more or less renewed by the fall of the leaf before it is pulled and by the return of its by-products to the soil. He wanted to see these sacks, the only residues, go back to the farmer who had grown the crop. So he goes about, a novel kind of missionary, preparing the way for a great change.

On our way back through the New Forest by a different route, we noticed the rows of Lombardy poplars lining the Ringwood road outside Romsey, followed by the cheerful surprise of cherry trees. An oasis in the desert of the Age of Destruction. We emerged from the New Forest near Downton and south of Landford Manor. Here the blind saint-like Douglas Eyre, of the family of the Squires of Bramshaw who championed the Commons' Defence Association in the last century, fostered a true peasantry on his estate. We emerged from the leafy glades to burst open what is surely the grandest pilgrim sight in the South of England, a sight he in his blindness had known in its every detail. The Lombardy poplars appeared again but their spirelets were a forecourt to the lord of all spires, the Spire of Salisbury. It gathered to it as by radiating lines the whole visible scarp of the Downs beyond it and the unseen waters of the five rivers that parted their flanks. It drew all things to it, hills and rivers, earth and sky. It was a taper of flame that lit up the universe.

One of the most beautiful of Edward Seago's paintings in his exhibition at Norwich last year is of this very scene, with two nuns in the foreground, as though to stress the divine humanity, the godly earthliness of that spire. Seago had seen that dateless view as Cobbett had seen it, and Cobbett saw it as the heart of the essential, the deathless England that in his day had begun to die. Now I saw it when it is all but dead. But the spire, the spire is the assurance that it shall not utterly perish at the hands of the "THING" and that the divine spark is still hidden in that heart. All the noble sights I had seen across the miles and across the centuries, the lonely landscapes, the sonorous

clouds over them and the great towers between land and sky, these are the undying England.

We returned to Devizes by the terraced road that winds with the narrow but infinitely versatile Avon Valley, Cobbett's own, as far as the confines of Amesbury. The hamlets all mark fords, Woodford, Durnford and Wilsford; the right of the road is all steep sheep-walk, now sheepless, with intervals of hanging woodland; the left is all water-meadow. Yet this bewitching valley has the diversity of fairyland where loosed are our mortal limitations. The little river slips along a valley that opens and closes, narrows and widens, whose walls lift and fall, whose trees are now dense and now scattered. Vagrant stream, bare downs, meadow luxury, woodland retirement, old willows with young heads on their shoulders, in the seemingly endless interchange and modulations of Arcady.

Man had warmly responded to this lyric invitation. Cob cottages with chevroned mole-coloured reed-thatching, thatched cob walls with flint bottoms, minute manors of chequer-work flint and brick and flush-work in flint and freestone, some with pineapple finials, every modest building different from its neighbour by virtue of this common allegiance to the kindly materials of the valley. Some fairy godmother looks after it, since the tradition is wonderfully maintained there. The thatching is superlative there and yet in the flax-rick competition Wiltshire was the worst of the counties surveyed. Its straw was ruined by nitrogenous fertilizers or the combine-harvester. The survival of the Avon Valley must be precarious. But so long as it does survive, it will inspire the few to convert the many.

VII

It will seem that I have forgotten the prime purpose of this itinerary, to judge flax-ricks. But no, as in all good journeys and stories, the best is reserved to the end and so the first prize comes last. To reach it, we went east, through Bedwyn and Froxfield, draped about its village green like gossips round a hearth, and arrived at the outskirts of Hungerford. There, painted on the idle body of the Mill straddling the Kennet, was a notice for no traveller to miss—*Mill House Teas*. Living on the goodness of the

earth but helping to create it had been replaced by living on the motor-car.

We reached Garston between Hungerford and Lambourn, through lanes that were quite different from the lanes of Somerset, of the Wiltshire river-vallies, of the dry combes of the Hampshire Highlands, of the Severn Vale and of the pockets within the Gloucestershire massif, but still were lanes. There were three flax-ricks, each with gable-end finials of ears of corn and one with the V-sign of two "necks" of plaited straw, crowned with the ears. They were finely strung from the base which was generously faggoted. They were thatched with combed reed and the spicks or pins were staggered to prevent the rain from scoring runnels down the roof. The eaves projected well over the stem and each rick was as well proportioned as a Cotswold cottage.

What interested me particularly was that the builder of these ricks had not only handled an unfamiliar crop but had taught himself to be a thatcher and a hurdler. Yet this was by far the most traditional of the ricks we had examined and the V-sign in the middle of the ridge was a modern adaptation of the ancient dolly or mell or kern-baby or neck that was once a ritual symbol of the corn-spirit. He deserved his first prize—sixty miles away from the second. He had made an "island of example."

So I am brought to Hosking's own, the "island of example" for whose harbour he has been making through years of frustration, experiment and preparation and for whose sake he has been slowly disengaging himself from the bonds of commerce. And when he came to map out for me the contours of his still distant island, it was nothing more and nothing less than an image of his father's farm. The achievement of the thatcher who had made a traditional stack by self-education was in little an illustration of Hosking's own pilgrimage.

I asked him what improvements he would make, what novelties he would introduce. He pondered for some time and answered that he could not think where his father had gone wrong. True, he would have a small tractor, but it should be kept well in the background. Suffolk horses should be the mainstay of his cultivations. He would have a choice herd of dairy cows but not to sell the milk off the farm. Nor would he sell his hay and straw as his father never did. He would litter his cattle as his father did. Like his father's, his cattle were going to be South Devons. It is an

interesting sidelight on his journey away from the home-farm and back to it again that South Devons have been recently judged by continental cattlemen as among if not the hardiest, weightiest and healthiest for restocking Europe. Bullocks and pigs and bees and rotated poultry, they would all be there. For he had come to the conclusion that what his father did with the farm on the river in Cornwall was the best that could be done. "There is no substitute for the best."

But what he would do would be to fill in the framework of his father's economy and develop it to the fullness of its capacity. Herein lies the true meaning of progress. Thus he would grow flax and have one or two small workshops on the land to train workers in hand-spun and hand-woven flax, such as he has begun to do already at the Flax Mill at Pluckley in Kent. Again he echoed Cobbett who discoursed on the linen, hand-woven from flax, he had observed in the Avon Valley and on Long Island when he was in America. The same for wool. He would have a withy bed for basketing and a hazel coppice for hurdling his folded sheep. He would have a farm-carpenter and a wood-master to make his own furniture and sell to others. And to all his little industries and to the farm itself should be attached a system of apprenticeship both to carry on the continuity within the farm and to benefit the world without. Above all, he would set in motion once more the stone-mill that belongs to a fieldsman of his and grind flour for bread that was not a cheat and the ghost of itself. But these details, pleasant to dwell upon, were all secondary to the main purpose, the keystone of the arch. His economy, like his father's before him, would be the economy of self-subsistence.

The interest of Hosking's story is his own. It is also that of every pilgrim's progress from home into the City of Destruction by one gate and out of it by another. But it is something else as well. *It is the story of our own nation before and after the Industrial Revolution. In the most literal sense of the word we left home after it and where we have arrived at the present day is in the Doubting Castle of Giant Despair. But the story is not yet finished.*

CHAPTER XII

EPILOGUE

"The Inca system of government was founded on that iniquitous and disastrous doctrine that the individual bears the same relation to the State as a child to its parent, that its life from the cradle to the grave must be regulated for it by a Power it is taught to regard as omniscient. What wonder that a system so unspeakably repugnant to a being who feels that his will is a divinity working within him fell to pieces at the first touch of foreign invasion. For the whole State was, so to speak, putrid even before dissolution, and when it fell it mingled with the dust and was forgotten.

W. H. HUDSON.

THE MODERN CHRISTIAN often judges contemporary society for reverting into heathenism. But the only fruitful analogies between the pre-Christian world and our own industrial one are those of the Peruvian culture of the Incas and the later Roman Empire. The civilisation of prehistoric Peru was an elaborate form of State socialism which denied personal freedom and individual responsibility. The cult of the divine Emperor at Rome was an idealisation of the city-state. It was no longer regional nor one of a constellation of towns as in mediæval Italy and ancient Hellas, but the world-city regarded as the supreme State. The modern German State, incomparably more barbarous and savage than the Peruvian, but founded on the same conception, is on the eve of the same dissolution and for the same reason as Hudson has described at the head of the chapter. Other industrial States must follow it into the dust if they catch the infection of its servile populace, omnipotent government and a-moral technocracy at the disposal of great combines and syndicates like the *Interessen Gemeinschaft Fardenindustrie*.

Modern society has not reverted to the normal type of Pagan culture. These, for all their diversity, were akin in springing from and maintaining the same root-principle, attachment to earth. The general mark of an industrial civilisation is detachment from earth. Yet with the revival of agriculture in our own nation, not from choice but necessity, something happened to us.

Our national consciousness derived from our rural past pushed out a tender root into the soil and budded under the heavens. This stirring of new life expressed itself in the symbol of a yearly ceremony called Farm Sunday. Its name is a recognition as remote as it can be from the attempt on the other days of the year to degrade the farm into a mere business.

Farm Sunday is the old rite of Rogation in modern dress, with Beating the Bounds, so often associated with it, left out. When the parson blessed the fields at Rogation-tide, the church was in the fields; at the Harvest Festival, the fields came into the church. Each was a symbol of the organic link between agriculture and Christianity, repeatedly stressed in the New Testament. Once only have I myself seen this ancient and moving ceremony, and that was at Chipping Campden in the early thirties. Beating the Bounds was omitted—nobody knew anything about it. But the procession, headed by the vicar and the choir, set out from the church porch to bless the fields, not at any point outside the village that chanced to be convenient, but under a tall elm standing on the edge of Dover's Hill, the site both of an Iron Age earthwork and of the celebrated "Olympick Games."

Shakespeare undoubtedly attended these Games (Master Shallow ran a greyhound at them) which Captain Dover and Endimion Porter revived after they had fallen into disuse at the end of the Middle Ages. They enjoyed such popularity that an anthology of poems, *Annalia Dubrensia*, was published about them to which Michael Drayton, Samuel Daniel and other noted Elizabethan and Jacobean poets contributed. This elm was called the "Ten o'Clock Tree," because the rays of the sun struck upon it at that hour, just as they do at dawn on Midsummer's Day on the altar stone at Stonehenge. Before the fourteenth century, when the older church by the town hall was in use, the sun, the older church and the site of the elm tree were all in alignment exactly at midday. Nobody can wander about among prehistoric monuments without noticing how often they were aligned to one another. The tree itself commands an extraordinarily spacious view from Brailles Clump above the Vale of the Red Horse in Warwickshire to the Black Mountains in Wales.

There is much more than an antiquarian interest in these details. They virtually prove that Rogation at Chipping Campden must in the past have been united with Beating the Bounds. This

ancient perambulation of the parish boundaries was a formal and periodic expression of the sense of place, that is to say of home. By thus making the circuit of the parish, its parishioners were making a declaration of their belongingness to it; by a ceremonial formality they were uttering in unison the significant words—this is our home.

At the same time, it is very clear that the Rogation rite of blessing the fields, now resuscitated under the title of Farm Sunday, is not an institution of the Church of England nor even of the Roman Church before it. It travels far beyond the Roman occupation of Britain whether Christian or Pagan. It dives so deep into the unrecorded past that the idea of a thanksgiving for the kindly fruits of the earth or a recognition that man's own powers are not great enough for him to grow and procure these fruits unaided, may be considered without exaggeration as part of the whole human consciousness. The Catholic Church merely sanctified this instinctive belief and purged it of certain debased elements that accompanied the decay of Paganism. The Church of England did no more than maintain the continuity.

That continuity was only broken from what may be called the days of Adam by our own Power Age, though a power ten times greater than anything mechanical or electrical we are able to employ would be puny compared with the power of a seed to shoot. And by breaking this continuity and dismissing it as obsolete, we broke down the sense of home.

For the combination of Beating the Bounds with Rogation reveals a treble sense of home. First, the sense of being at home in our own particular fields which supply us with our bread and attach us to them by innumerable other ties. Next, to this sense of belonging to our own place is that of belonging both to nature and our own particular traditions which are an anglicized version of something universal in man. Lastly, there is the seeming paradox of man's connection with some power beyond even this earth which supplies us with our needs, the power acknowledged in the act of blessing the fields. Man lives by bread, "the paragon of animals" but also as a spiritual being, not by bread alone.

Our home is upon the earth; it is upon one spot of this earth "beloved over all." But it is also, in a way we feel but cannot explain elsewhere and not in any transitory world governed by space and time at all. This I take to be the underlying significance

of Rogation. That we have revived it under the name of Farm Sunday is to confess to ourselves that "like the base Indian" we have "thrown a pearl away" and anxiously seek it once more.

The old rural England based on workshop, farm and village, whether free or held by manor or church, was founded upon the concept of personal property, administered as a duty no less than a right, as a social service no less than a safeguard of independence. The Natural Law of the Middle, Tudor and Stuart ages incorporated rules for good workmanship and the right use of property. This England both in its economic and organic aspects was Cobbett's standard of reference in everything he wrote. It was an England whose structure was based on the Natural Law, and the Natural Law was the Christian abstract of man's double relation to heaven and earth. Our new science enriches it by discovering the livingness of the soil, the interdependence of living creatures and the rule of return.

Like most writers occupied with rural England, I receive numerous letters from men in the Services. They are always illuminating and all of them hunger for the same end, to live on the land. One of them has a particular quality about it which speaks for them all.

The writer, who, I may say, is or was a squadron leader in the R.A.F., begins by saying that he had, after taking thought, reached certain conclusions "about the hope of England's future" which tallied with those I and others have for many years put forward. After mentioning some of these conclusions, such as "the dangers of thinking of the agricultural 'industry,'" the imperative need for yeoman farming, and the illusions cherished by planners and their kin, he puts his main point. The purpose of man's life should be, at any rate, in some measure, creative. Man is not an end in himself, but a means to an end, a means to God's end. How then can he be assured of a creative life? "Many people hold that by giving a man a chance of a creative leisure you can nullify the effects of deadening work." He believes this to be fundamentally unsound, and that creative leisure can never act as a substitute for creative work.

The writer goes on: "What do we in the Army, Navy and Air Force want to do after the war? The chance to do creative work. We want it passionately, most of us, because we are

revolted in our sub-consciences by the uncreative work we are called upon to do. Work that allows a man to express himself in it is good; work that does not is bad, it kills a man's soul." How can this creative work be secured? By cultivating a small farm, "not only for the satisfaction I would get out of that work but because I now believe that that type of life is the only basis for the healthy life of post-war England. I long for a village community and village life." "But," he continues, "I have reached this finality too late; I have no training for this, the good life, and I have a wife and children to support, with another job and an assured livelihood waiting. Besides, what chance is the small farmer going to be given by the planners in the post-war world? Am I to risk my family's welfare for a shot in the dark, for something, in fact, which the rulers of England may have no intention even of allowing to survive?" And the letter is signed "Yours in perplexity."

What about *my* perplexity? What advice could I give him? Was I to say something like this? England will not betray its native land again as it did in 1920; we have abandoned our former dreams of wealth at the expense of agriculture both at home and abroad; we no longer pursue the mirage of a thumping export trade, and we think now in terms of real, not fictitious, riches; no longer will our farmers be living on overdrafts at the bank, never again will their produce be rendered artificially worthless by imported cheap food raised by half-ruined farmers on exhausted soils; we intend to alter our whole economic system, and there is no danger of small farms being absorbed into larger units. Therefore, have no fear, buy your small farm and good luck to you.

It is fairly clear that I could not say this. Yet what large issues this letter raises! It is asking what government is for; whether it is above all moral law and has no obligations towards the governed, especially those who have risked their lives to preserve it. It challenges its assumption of autocratic power for itself and those monopolists and controllers of money who traffic in foreign exchanges and markets. It questions its right to deny the opportunity for "creative work" to those who have deserved well of their country, and to neglect or exploit the land of England at the will of economic forces that benefit neither land nor people. To frustrate the honourable and, more than that, the religious

purpose of a man like this, a true lover of his country, is to make men the mere pawns of power-politics.

Whether or no he would subscribe to the term, it was the Natural Law within himself that prompted my correspondent to write his letter. It is a Law that time cannot bind nor change invalidate. Avebury prefigured it; Glastonbury formulated and sanctified it; Farm Sunday remembered it. The best of Cobbett was its evangelist, and to acknowledge and reinterpret it is the redemption of England.

It is not to be denied that modern society has made giant strides of discovery. But it is equally clear that it has mainly failed to apply the new knowledge for the benefit of mankind. The failure is so pronounced that it is dragging Western civilisation nearer and nearer to some fall like Lucifer's. Perhaps it can be summed up as the loss of a design for living. To be destroying the earth—birds, beasts, fishes, vegetation and, most of all, soil—in order to make money out of it, and for nearly every country in the world to be fighting either within itself or with other countries, does not make sense. To be producing goods to perish at once in war, and in mere quantity with no customers or no money to buy them does not make sense. Common sense is the corner-stone of a design for living. But it is only the corner-stone, nor can the design be restored by abandoning the new knowledge and returning to the past. We cannot put the leaves back on the tree in December. What we can do is to find once more the living truth that crowned it with leaves and fruit.

Of that living truth, the organic way of growth out of the fundamental realities is the beginning. On the material side, a self-supporting and organic agriculture is essential because there is now no other way of feeding the peoples of the world with food enough. By food I mean nourishment from which the vital properties have not been removed nor sacrificed by modern ingenuity in evading organic laws for profit's sake. There is no other way of maintaining the fertility of the soil, that is to say, of passing on human life from age to age. There is no other way of building up resistance to deficiency diseases in man, beast, plant and soil. To support ourselves by organic methods would lead us out of the economic wilderness by opening up vast new fields of employment in the home-market, by making use of local

materials now wasted and by diverting trade and finance to national needs with which neither of them has for many years had anything to do. And organic self-help cannot exist without the "just price."

But the spiritual side is just as real and urgent, and the "just price," our practical need, was once a religious precept. Mr. Montague Fordham has well said that "the agricultural problem" is not primarily agricultural nor even political. "It is a problem of statesmanship applied to national life." The organic way is also a means of developing character, independence, ownership, whether co-operative or individual, and a right relation with nature. These are implicitly spiritual needs and an indispensable part of a design for living. If fulfilled, they would at once correct the mechanistic bias of the age. The organic way is, in short, the only one that can bring us within the influence of those everlasting principles that govern mortal life. Taken as a whole, modern urbanism is indifferent or hostile to religious principles. But Germany has given the world an example of what happens to a nation when it defies and murders them. We palter with them by turning values into valuations.

Because Cobbett did link the organic way of life with eternal truths, I have made him the keystone of the book. He was besides the most English of Englishmen. He possessed most of our virtues and a few of our faults. To heed his vision of England would be to return to ourselves.

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